

## The Preppers – Prologue

People should never ask ‘why’ because no two answers are ever the same. There are simply too many factors involved.

Sara asked me why I wanted to do what I suggested we begin doing. My response was to watch the History Channel and start reading PAW fiction. Post-Apocalyptic World was the subject matter in the stories and each author had a similar approach, yet different in the details.

I’d done some research based on the stories, determining what I thought to be a reasonable armory would cost. What a multi-year supply of LTS foods would cost for two persons. How much it would take to buy a prefabricated shelter and/or build our own. The cost of the radiation detection equipment, chemical detection equipment, gas masks, Tyvek suits and on and on and on. How large of a whole house standby generator would be required and cost and whether we would want gasoline, diesel or propane.

I’m a mechanic making at the time around \$21 an hour or just short of 44 grand. Sara worked too as an Administrative Assistant making about \$15 an hour. Our combined gross income was on the order of 75 grand a year, before taxes and other charges. We both paid for health insurance offered by our employers and between the two had zero medical expenses.

During our third year of marriage, Sara had gotten pregnant and we couldn’t have been happier. Then, she had a miscarriage and the OB/Gyn suggested we wait a year or two before trying again. Two and a half years passed before we were expecting again. The doctor confined her to bed rest and simple chores forcing her to take a leave without pay.

Her company was sympathetic and said if she could continue to pay her share of the health insurance premium, they’d continue to pay their share. It made it tight for us financially, but we cut out some non-essentials and resorted to using up the double bought food in the basement. During her 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> week, she began to have problems and ended up in the hospital. The baby was behind the normal development milestones and something was terribly wrong when she began to hemorrhage. The eventual outcome was a total surprise, her condition required a hysterectomy.

Sara returned to work 3 months later, mainly I think, to keep her mind busy and not dwell on the irreversible past. Once our circumstances permitted, I attended more of the training classes offered by the manufacturer on new changes and what not. I got a promotion to Assistant Service Manager with an accompanying raise. It went up to a grand a week, gross – salaried not hourly.

Our home was getting close to being paid off due to double payments and applying bonuses received against the loan principal.

## The Preppers – Before

Plus we had savings, ten percent of our net income went into a high interest rate checking account. I brought the subject up concerning preparedness, fishing for information. I expected more of a fight than I got and we joined the ranks.

“Are you sure that this is what you want to do Tom?”

“I’m pretty sure. The house will be free and clear in less than 3 years. Once we rebuild our short term supplies by double buying, we should be able to begin.”

“Basement shelter?”

“I’d rather build a double wall freestanding shelter. A square has the most usable square footage. Say two walls of block with six feet of earthfill in between. The overhead would be poured concrete covered with a minimum of six feet of earth overburden. I’ve been researching this for over 3 years and have a list of what we’ll need when. We may end up bending a law or two, but if we’re discrete we might just be able to pull it off.”

“What laws?”

“Our own well and a septic system. Both violate city ordinances. The sizes of tanks I want to install aren’t allowed in our zoning, R-1.”

“How do you plan to get around that? I doubt you could get building permits.”

“What the City doesn’t know won’t hurt us. I’ll get the septic tank, sewer lines and leech field lines out of town. Space isn’t problem with our 2½ acre lot. We’re only within the City Limits so they could they gouge us for things like fire protection, gas, sewer and water.”

“Where do you want to start?”

“A well followed by the septic. We bring in a well driller to drill irrigation well for the garden. Meanwhile, I’ll dig in the septic system and we’ll follow that with the shelter.”

“How long have you been thinking about this?”

“Since September 11, 2001.”

“Five years? Anything you haven’t checked out thoroughly?”

“More than a few things, but it’s more a matter of depth of investigation than lack of investigation.”

“How can I help?”

“Just keep saving, I have an idea it’s going to cost more than I’ve assumed. How much do we have in savings?”

“Twenty two thousand, two hundred and seventeen dollars.”

“You find a well driller and I’ll go up to KC and get a large septic tank and the lines. We want the well in the backyard close to the house. I can tap into the main sewer line in the basement and add a valve to divert the sewage to the septic tank if it becomes necessary.”

The first two steps weren’t that difficult, Sara lined up a well driller and I went to KC and got a PVC septic tank, schedule 40 sewer lines and leech lines. I unloaded the stuff and covered it with a tarp to conceal it from wandering eyes. While I had planned on digging the hole and trenches myself, Sara ended up getting in a local guy with a backhoe and long armed trencher.

When I’d been reading some of TOM’s stories, a comment caught my attention. The depth of the leech field. Water from a leech field percolates upward and if you don’t have enough soil between the lines and the vegetables, you may end up with vegetables that give you the trots. The high point of our leech field was 12’, the average under the garden was 13’ and the lower end 14’. That’s why the long reach trencher.

The well driller had installed an electric pump powered by a PV panel, as requested, with connections for either a battery or other 12VDC source. The local had the hole and trenches in and I picked up a couple of yards of ½” gravel. The following Saturday, I shoveled in the gravel while Sara hit the sales at the grocery stores.

I manhandled the tank in place and got it turned to line up the outlet with the trench leading to the leech field. After I helped her unload and we had a quick bite of lunch, we connected the sections of pipe leading to the leech field and had them in place. We then buried the tank and that line. Each set of sections of the perforated pipe was cemented together and laid in its trench. Finally, we attached the elbows and T-fittings and cemented the leech field together. I started back filling the leech field, by hand...gravel followed by a permeable cover followed by soil. I worked until dark and finished up Sunday after church.

The brother of one of the guys at work was a plumber and also a prepper. He came out Monday evening and we tapped into the sewer line in the basement and ran the lines through the wall and connected them to the tank.

“Be careful Tom, you get caught with a working septic system and you’ll get a hefty fine.”

“That’s why I had you put in the valve. We use regular sewer except in an emergency. Might just as well, we have to pay for it anyway.”

“How deep are the leech lines?”

“At the top, 12’ deep and at the bottom 14’ deep.”

“Are you nuts? Nobody puts lines that deep.”

“They’re well surrounded by ½” gravel with an impermeable barrier over the top to keep the soil from sifting down. I intended to plant my garden above them and you need at least 12’ of soil to clarify the effluent.”

“Where’s your well?”

“In the back near the corner of the house. It’s a good one, 15 gallons per minute. The water tested pure and it tastes better than city water.”

“Decide between a buried shelter and an above ground?”

“Above ground, double wall construction with earth fill.”

“That’s a lot easier than burying one. I wish we’d have gone that way. Decide on a generator?”

“Propane or diesel whole house generator, but we haven’t selected one.”

“Keep in mind that biodiesel can be created from oil seeds if something bad were to happen.”

“Diesel then?”

“That’s what we chose. Both Cummins and Kohler make good units. Cummins makes a unit for semi tractors and RVs, the Quiet Diesel. The largest model will produce over 100 amps. That’s the one I wish we had picked.”

“Expensive?”

“What isn’t? Been grocery shopping lately? Around ten-eleven grand.”

“Holy cow, I had no idea.”

“Plus the installation kit, an automatic transfer switch, a diesel tank and the diesel fuel. I use PRI-D for diesel and PRI-G for gasoline. Heard of them?”

“Read about them in some stories.”

“Those authors always forget to mention how much everything costs, right?”

“True. I’ve checked various things out on the internet and have a vague idea what this is going to cost.”

“That’s just the cost of having some piece of mind. Joe said you and your wife can’t have kids, sorry. However, having kids just makes it harder and takes a lot longer to get prepped.”

“Man, I hated that. I suppose it wasn’t meant to be.”

“What about hot water, the kitchen stove and furnace?”

“All natural gas.”

“Let me check the models and I’ll get you the jets to convert them to propane. You can reimburse me my discounted cost.”

“Ok, Charlie thanks.”

That was another thing; a propane tank...the list was getting longer. After deciding on the location, we had soil and rock brought in and prepared the platform to hold the shelter. The inside dimension was 25ft square, making the outside dimension more like 38ft square. After putting in the platform, Charlie came back and we ran a water line, sewer line, propane line and conduit to hold the power lines.

We had decided on putting the ATS in the shelter and running lines back to the breaker panel for the house. That would have to wait until the shelter was erected. I had to get enough blocks for 260ft of 9ft wall plus more for the wall in front of the blast door and more for the outside wall to raise it to 15ft. We hired the block done by a guy who laid block as a weekend project. That took a couple of months.

The blast door and air purifier came in during the interim and we got them installed. The shelter wasn’t finished by any stretch of the imagination; we needed the earthfill, appliances, furniture, food and the armory. We needed ham licenses and radios, tanks and fuel. Charlie said he’d run the propane lines and put in the valves after we got a tank.

He and Joe helped with tamping the earth fill and putting in the  $\frac{3}{4}$  bath, the 4 in 1 kitchen and walls for the three bedrooms. There would be a master bedroom and two bunk rooms, male and female. Each would have 3 pair of bunks and the master had a queen sized box spring and mattress plus a closet bar and one chest of drawers.

We sold off our Kitco gold pool account to get the money to finish up. We got a used, low hour 12.5 Quiet Diesel for \$7,500 including the used installation kit and the used ATS. Charlie picked up a used water pressure tank and installed it. A local company closed its doors due to the economy and I bought their propane tank, a 3,300 gallon model. A service station in the next town went belly up and someone bought the loca-

tion to install a new business. The tanks were sold for scrap value and we got a good 14,000 gallon tank. What's the scrap value of a fiberglass tank? It would cost about 35 grand to fill it. We build an underground room for the generator and connected to the shelter with a 30" concrete culvert.

Let's see...the bunks came from a place on the web, we replaced our queen sized box springs and mattress with a king sized and moved the queen to the shelter. We added a 19" TV and VHS/DVD player. Two 6' folding tables and 16 folding chairs made up the dining room. Used lockers were acquired for the bunk rooms and the dresser for the master bedroom. Sara and I both got Technician's licenses and were working on General Class.

We combined our yearend bonuses and ordered two one year deluxe food supplies from Walton. We also bought an All American pressure canner and started shopping garage sales for jars. Obama won the election and I suppose I'd better keep what I think about that to myself. We were down to needing the armory and radio equipment and a lot of diesel. We were buying a 2,000 gallon load once per quarter and had both the PRI-D and PRI-G stored. I had 2 new chainsaws and 6 55 gallon drums of stabilized gasoline.

New car sales were way down but repairs were up. People were keeping old Betsy and keeping her tuned for maximum performance. I drove an old pickup and Sara drove an old compact. I liked them because they were old, simple and easy to repair. We had a set of shelves filled with repair parts including some rebuilt units. Because both were gas fueled, I wanted more gasoline stored. We had a full set of new spares mounted on new rims plus snow tires mounted on a second set of used rims.

"How are we doing on jars?"

"Just short of 200 quarts, around 100 pints and maybe 4 dozen jelly jars. They're hard to find at garage sales."

"Want to order some from Canning Pantry?"

"How many?"

"A dozen cases of quarts and half dozen pints plus a full case of lids."

"Sure. We can do it again a couple of times before we put in the garden. We have the diesel delivery this month."

"Forgot about that, I'll hold off. Get another two drums of gas and order the stuff from Utah next month."

"Have you decided on firearms yet?"

“Yes and no. A main battle rifle for me and an assault rifle for you. A .45 auto for me and a 9mm for you. Want a 12 gauge or 20 gauge?”

“Twelve...makes for one size of shells. Keep it simple, will you?”

“An M14 for me and Mini-14 for you? A PT1911 for me and a Browning Hi-Power for you? A pair of Mossberg 590s?”

“We need .22s.”

“A pair of Marlin lever actions ok?”

“Sure.”

The gun dealer began grinning when we walked in and was positively ecstatic when we left. I ordered a M1A Loaded for me and a Ranch rifle for her. We got the 590A1s with 15 shot slings, side saddles and elastic buttstock shell holders. My pistol was a Taurus PT1911 and hers a Browning Hi-Power Classic. The .22 rifles were Marlin 39A. Our backup guns were PPKs in .380. We had a list of online ammo dealers and places where we could buy extra magazines. All said and done, her armory cost about what mine did. My rifle was a lot more than hers but her Browning cost more than my Taurus.

The guns came in within three weeks and by then we had ammo and magazines on hand. Shotgun shells were Remington Magnum Express buckshot in 00 and #4 and Brenneke Black Magic 1 $\frac{3}{8}$ oz slugs. The ammo for my rifle was the Hornady 168gr A-MAX Match. For her rifle it was boxer primed surplus; 5,000 rounds FMJ. Pistol ammo was Speer Gold Dot HP and Clean Fire Lawman FMJ, both 230 grain for my Taurus and both 124 grain Clean Fire Lawman and 124gr +P Gold Dot for her Browning. One case of hollow points each, two cases of FMJ each.

Every step we took brought us just that much closer to being prepared. We picked up a used 5kw portable generator at a garage sale so we'd have power while the Quiet Diesel was being serviced. We took a firearms class and got CCWs. We practiced until we could hit what we were shooting at. By the end of 2009, we needed one more load to fill the diesel tank and had replaced all the ammo we'd shot up doing practice. The garden had been a good producer and we had the shelves in the basement filled with home canned food and more in the shelter.

For Christmas 2009, we bought SSB CB radios for the vehicles and base stations for the house and shelter. For my birthday in March, I received a Kenwood ham radio, a vertical and a Cushcraft beam with rotor. I bought her the 75' tower plus a personal gift. Our birthdays were only days apart, but she was two years younger. My company decided to replace their existing Motorola business radios with newer digital models and offered the business band mobiles and portables to the employees for a reduced price. They were really cheap and we bought all we could afford although it meant pushing

back the diesel purchase a month. Never could understand why a car dealer had business radios.

By Independence Day, 2010, we were mostly prepped. Another Walton order was being shipped bringing us to a 3 year supply for two people not counting the canned goods and the double bought store goods. Sometimes we'd switch the valve from the sewer to the septic and fertilize the soil under the garden for a week or two. We occasionally switched to the well water too to keep the seals good. I always added Rid-X when we were on the septic. We didn't use the disposal and didn't flush any grease when we were on septic.

Sara had a real talent for making pickles. We had dill, dill with garlic, bread and butter and sweet, in quantity. Instead of the Country Living Mill, we went with the Diamant 525 from Lehman's with spare burrs. The 4 in 1 kitchen in the shelter had 4 burners, an oven, a sink and a microwave. We added a refrigerator (only) and chest freezer from Sears. The freezer was our spare and the refrigerator left turned on but at a warmer setting. We bolted used office cabinets to the shelter walls for the communications and radiation gear, a second for the firearms and a third for spices, etc.

We watched sales and checked clearance end caps and slowly assembled stainless steel tableware and Melamine plates, cups and bowls for 16. Other things were acquired over time, like pots, pans and utensils... sometimes new and sometimes from garage sales. Sara bought me a Night Force variable scope with A.R.M.S. mounts for Christmas and I bought her a red dot sight for the Ruger and a lot of clothes...mostly denims because they were long lasting. And there was something about that bottom hugging fit.

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We live in Steelville and worked in Rolla, the nearest big town. Our last name, for the record, is Brown. Tom Brown isn't John Doe, but it is close. I almost bought a PTR-91 and would have until I learned what the fluted chamber did to brass. I went with the much more expensive M1A Loaded. The advantage was that if you knew how to dismantle the M1A, you knew how to dismantle the Mini-14. And, just maybe, the M1A might be more accurate...medium weight air gauged match barrel.

With the scope sighted in using the match ammo, I checked it with the softpoint. It was close enough and I left it sighted in with the A-MAX Match. With Sara's Mini-14, it didn't matter which ammo we used but we bought some softpoint for two legged targets because of the light bullet weight. When we replaced the FMJ, we replaced it with the softpoint.

Steelville is a small town, maybe 1,500, give or take. Not many good paying jobs locally. Sara's employer started a buying program for the employees for LTS foods. They would be sole sourcing from Emergency Essentials. The prices were higher than Walton and



they didn't have anything we didn't already have. However, in the spirit of the offer we bought one set of the Super-pails.

We had assembled our own first aid kit and it was also an only aid kit. We had a full assortment of bandages including the blood stoppers, several sizes of gauze pads and tape. We also had disposable medical instruments like scalpel blades and more permanent items like the scalpel handles and hemostats. There were all kinds of burn products, every shape and size of Band-Aid and assorted elastic bandages. We both took the CPR class and followed that by taking the EMT Basic class together.

It went from a First Aid Kit to Only Aid Kit when Sara talked our doctor into prescribing blood bulkers and IV sets. After she had worked him over pretty good, I had a turn and went for Tylenol III and IV in 100 tablet bottles. He didn't indicate the number of refills and I corrected his oversight.

Sara came down with something and he prescribed Cipro and she added 5 refills. The next time she went in, he said the pharmacy called and he'd approved the refills and shame on her for doing that. She didn't tell him she hadn't taken the original prescription and that we had 6 courses of Cipro treatments. Then, when I sprained my wrist, he prescribed 800mg Motrin...need I say more?

We bought a case of N-95 disposable masks when there was no worry about this or that pandemic and got the order filled immediately. We ordered 4 Millennium gas masks with CBRN filters plus a second case of the CBRN filters. We added 4 Tyvek suits, boots, gloves and tape.

We bought .22 ammo by the 5,000 round cases in Solid, HP and Hyper velocity. Once we were comfortable with the Marlins, we hunted tree rats and rabbits. My M1A loaded with the A-MAX took a deer. While we weren't necessarily 100% prepared, we were as probably as close as we could come. From that point in time, mid 2011, we kicked into a routine of using our supplies and purchasing replacements.

Food with limited shelf lives was used before it could go bad; medications with expiration dates were stored for the longest shelf life and replaced when Doc said we needed to. Gold had remained above \$1,000 and we didn't buy back into the Kitco program or acquire gold. We had \$500 face each of pre-65 dimes, quarters and halves, they would have to do.

"How come we don't have any cowboy guns?"

"Like the Colt SAA?"

"Or, any clone in that caliber."

"Why would we want single action revolvers?"

"I wasn't limiting my question to revolvers. The Marlin 1895 Cowboy uses .45-70 cartridges."

"Give me one good reason why we'd want cowboy guns."

"That's easy. If you agree, can we get two revolvers and two rifles?"

"For the life of me, I can't think of any reason why you'd want them."

"Same offer."

"Ok, convince me and we'll get them."

"What year did Colt bring out the Single Action Army?"

"Easy, 1873."

"What year did the Springfield rifle and carbines come out that used the .45-70?"

"The same year, 1873."

"When was smokeless powder invented?"

"I don't know. Later?"

"A Frenchman invented the first in 1884 and Alfred Nobel came out with his own later in 1887. The original .45 Colt and .45-70 cartridges were loaded with black powder. Black powder is 75% potassium nitrate (salt peter), 15% carbon (charcoal powder) and 10% sulfur. All we have to stockpile is primers, we can make our own black powder and cast lead bullets."

"Ok, you win. What barrel length?"

"I want a Cavalry revolver, 7½."

"Two 7½" in whatever brand he has in stock and two Marlin 1895 Cowboys? Gun belts? Scabbards? How much ammo?"

"You can stop when you run out of money; just be sure and get enough extra primers for the rifle and revolver cartridges."

After that, Sara and I resumed saving, thinking that both vehicles would eventually need to be replaced. Our revolvers were vg used 2005 Ruger Vaqueros. I stayed in touch with Charlie and saw Joe nearly every day. They were trying to start a Mutual Aid Group, with little success. Ultimately, Charlie and I help Joe build his own shelter and move their things from their basement to their new above ground shelter. Friends do.

The Ruger Vaquero is a New Model Blackhawk with fixed sights consisting of a front blade and a notch milled into the frame at the rear. The first version was a 7½” barreled revolver chambered in .45 Colt with a simulated color case-hardened frame and a blue barrel, grip frame, and cylinder. This was followed by models with a 5½” barrel and a 4⅝” barrel based on the other common barrel lengths of the Colt SAA. The three versions were offered in stainless steel and other calibers including .44 magnum, .357 magnum, and .44-40 Winchester. Originally all Ruger Vaqueros were shipped with walnut grips incorporating a Ruger logo in a medallion. Like the New Model Blackhawk the Vaquero does not require the hammer to be half-cocked for loading and unloading, and uses a transfer bar mechanism which prevents the cartridge under the hammer from being fired without the trigger being pulled.

We eventually ended up with new Marlin 1894 and 1895 Cowboys in .45 Colt and .45-70 plus 3 used Rugers each, one in each barrel length.

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Not being much of a political animal, I got much of my news from the forums and would then use Home Town News to locate a paper. Most of our news came from Fox News broadcasts and their website. These days, most news organizations would have made Pulitzer and Hearst proud. Lose you on the turn? Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst are the source of the term ‘Yellow Journalism’ arising from their circulation battles circa 1900 when they emphasized sensationalism rather than hard news. Even Fox wasn’t totally immune.

On Tuesday August 30, 2011 some fruitcake/terrorist attempted to assassinate Barack Hussein Obama, our President, with an IED installed in a panel truck. Those White House limousines are built to withstand quite a bit and the President survived. He was in the hospital in critical condition. Like him or not, he was our President and the nation held its breath. I’m not sure whether it was from fear that Obama would die or fear of Biden becoming President. Same difference I suppose.

He succumbed to his injuries on Thursday, September 1, 2011. Biden was the new President and he asked Harry Reid to accept the nomination to the post of Vice President. Reid had lost the 2010 election and saw a chance to get back in the Senate; he accepted.

Biden, a long time sufferer of foot in mouth disease, didn’t follow Obama’s path of appearing in public 8 days a week. He kept Robert Gibbs as the White House spokesman and Gibbs continued his past practice of emulating Biden’s condition. You may not agree, but you know it’s true.

The missile shield in Eastern Europe, long on hold, was immediately implemented because the radar and missiles only needed to be transported and erected. Russia protested. Iran protested. Israel placed a large order for Standard Three missiles (RIM-161,

SM-3) to replace their Arrow/Patriot systems. The missiles had been built anticipating the needs of the US Navy and potential sale to the Israelis. The US Navy had planned to replace all of the SM-2s with SM-3s over a ten year period ending in 2018. Israel had been negotiating for the SM-3s and finally signed the contract. The SM-3 missile was a direct replacement for the SM-2; however the electronics aboard the CGs and DDGs had to be swapped.

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In point of fact, the US Navy halted the DDG-1000 Zumwalt build at 3 ships and had ordered 3 additional Burke class DDGs. It was expected that additional Burke DDGs would be ordered. Was there a Block III in the offing?

We checked our supplies and ordered 4 more 1 year units from Walton and added more of the ammo. That ate into our savings and I went through the vehicles one at a time, tuning and tweaking. A junkyard provided parts I could rebuild. We also ordered drums of oil, plus air, fuel and oil filters for the Quiet Diesel and a rebuild kit for the engine.

We had planted our average sized garden to allow us to fill in what we'd used up and, this year, included extra cucumbers for pickles. Diversion of the sewer to the septic had ensured a fertile garden plot. We bought a whole beef and two hogs at the meat store to fill our freezers. We also bought two cases of Cure 81 half hams, six small Butterball turkeys, 4 cases of 2 pound packages of bacon and 30 pound boxes of butter.

Fearful that something untoward might come out of the heightening tensions, we flat out ask Doc for a full set of medications to have available for him or another Doctor if something serious happened. We got the prescriptions and written instructions, just in case. Not *Justin Case*, which was a story. The instructions included the condition, dosing, precautions, adverse effects, etc. He limited the IVs to 500ml bags, one full case each, of D5W and Lactated Ringer's solution and two cases of normal saline. Other prescriptions provided for prefilled syringes of various drugs. He was very thorough and admitted that he belonged to a MAG. Doc went on to suggest several OTC meds, anti-Diarrheal, Laxative, Benadryl, etc. He reflected on the prescriptions and added anti-virals, both Tamiflu and Relenza but could only suggest which to use for what. Apparently Tamiflu didn't do much for H1N1. The best approach, in his opinion, was isolation.

World tensions continued to escalate with China moving a portion of its military forces across from Taiwan. Russia moved its troops and equipment from the Ukraine in the south to the Baltic Nations in the north (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia), including multiple Divisions of Infantry, Artillery, Armor and Wings of Aircraft.

While they built some great fighters, their pilots don't get nearly the training of pilots in free countries. Their annual allotment of flying hours were only slightly more than our pilots got per month. Their air-to-air missiles are close to what the free countries had and, with missiles, the pilot doesn't have to be the very best.

Meanwhile our new President urged the shipbuilders to work around the clock to complete the 3 Destroyers under construction and finish the Ford earlier than planned. It was tentatively scheduled to be completed in 2013 due to problems with some of the new technologies. Apparently the Admirals never heard the expression, *if it ain't broke, don't fix it*.

The US had been totally out of Iraq 9 months ahead of schedule with the last personnel and equipment leaving in early March this year. The surge in Afghanistan worked and units were no longer being replaced when they were withdrawn. We hadn't learned the lesson from history and those fighters were very creative. Maybe we should have sent Rambo....

The Walton order finally came in and included the two extra 50 pound bags of cocoa. We didn't dare order more because of the shelf life. As it was, we now had a five year supply for two not counting the extra from Emergency Essentials, our home canned goods and extra store bought items. We made a trip into St. Louis to a Costco store, a semi-annual event, and loaded up on pinto beans, coffee, tea, spices, butter, more bacon and Jasmine rice, ten 50# bags.

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China began lobbing missiles against Taiwan in early November and the (lame duck) President sent the Reagan and Stennis to stand off 200 miles east of Taiwan. They were later joined by the Lincoln and the Nimitz was forward stationed to Pearl with its Strike Group. The Washington remained in Yokosuka in case North Korea acted up. Several Ohio class boomers were believed to be in the area and, according to the rumor mill, the Jimmy Carter with its load of SEALs moved to join the Task Group. Additionally, several 688I class and about half of the Virginia class were deployed to the Task Group. There was a tremendous amount of shuffling occurring. Two of the SSGNs joined the task group. In a surprise move, it was decided to pull all of our troops from Afghanistan and redeploy them to Korea and an armor Division was added to the US forces in South Korea.

Additionally, 4 B-2s were combat loaded and deployed to Guam. Several B-1Bs were combat loaded and moved to points unknown. No one said whether or not the B-1Bs had been retrofitted for nukes. The Buffs were fitted with the ALCMs and also moved to new locations. The nation was rapidly taking on a war footing. It was well that we had stayed ahead of the curve, the various suppliers of LTS foods weren't accepting new orders and even ammo prices slipped up about 15%.

At work, our repair back log began to rise with appointments being scheduled for as much as 6 weeks in the future. The problem with the latest model vehicles was few mechanics could afford all of the computer equipment required to evaluate problems and effect repairs. The owner decided to add a second shift in the Service Department and I got the nod. It took a bit to line up qualified repair staff but they were available if you

were willing to pay. That only lasted for about two months before we got caught up but the second shift was retained and I picked up a very nice bonus.

We spent a fair portion of it on denims for me, a pair of Wellington boots and a pair of western boots, a new winter coat for each of us and new under garments for both. We also added an ACOG for my M1A and a 4X scope for Sara's Mini-14.

"Now what honey? Have we missed anything we need or might need?"

"No Sara, nothing I can think of. How about a Katadyn water filter in case we're forced to Bug out? We could get their Micropur purification tablets, too. Maybe their Hiker Pro, a pair with spare filters."

"How are we on gasoline?"

"Eight drums. Want to get more?"

"Can we handle 4 more?"

"The filters, purification tablets and 4 drums of gas will finish off the bonus."

"I sure hope I don't have to lug that EMR pack with two gun bearers and God only knows how much gear."

"If we do, we'll stick to the Mountain House individual one and two serving meals. I packed some of the Gatorade powder to maintain our electrolytes and minerals. The Mountain Hardwear Trango 3.1 4 season tent is in my bag. We have the stainless steel GI style canteens, cups and stoves. We'll manage, if we must."

"There's no way we can carry all we have here."

"I know and Bugging Out will be our last option. If we have to do it, and assuming we have time, we'll move everything from the basement to the shelter and lock the shelter down. That should keep anyone except the most determined away from our stuff. I'm not sure I could break into the shelter in lock down mode if I didn't already know how."

"That was sneaky what you did. If a person didn't know where the access rod was buried, they'd have no way to turn the lugs back into the door. And, you did a good job of camouflaging the hole."

"Make sure you keep your tank at least  $\frac{3}{4}$  full and your BOB in the trunk. Anyone recognize the Galco purse for what it is?"

"Maybe one or two, but they have Galco purses too. I'm tempted to carry the Browning rather than the PPK."

“That’s up to you. I carry the PPK, but my Taurus is in the glove compartment.”

“But you take off your sport coat!”

“I bought a DeSantis Apache ankle holster and a magazine carrier for the other leg.”

“We can’t wear slacks.”

“We need to get dinner out of the way and catch the news. Biden is addressing the nation at 8 Central.”

“Any idea what it’s about?”

“Lots of speculation, but no two people could agree.”

“From the Oval office?”

“I don’t think so. Apparently multiple federal agencies shut down and all three branches evacuated, according to the rumor mill. Oh, Homeland Security raised the warning level to Orange overall and red for transportation. I’ll see if I can get Frugal’s up and see what TOM posted.”

“Supper’s ready. What’d TOM say?”

“The usual, ‘Lock and Load’.”

“One of these days he’s going to be right.”

“Maybe, but he’s a little paranoid.”

Supper was minute steak sandwiches and fries. We had plenty of time and cleaned up the kitchen and turned on Fox News. They were as much in the dark as everyone and were hesitating to speculate, for a change. MSNBC and CNN, were going through the experts predicting everything from WW III to an asteroid striking the Earth. The President was cautioning but didn’t really suggest that anything was imminent.

The company didn’t seem to care about what was going on around the world; they had other plans, a class in Detroit. It wasn’t my idea of a good place to be if the balloon went up. And, I was expected to fly there, picking up a flight at Lambert Field to Detroit and back after the 4 day class was over. The boss said I could take Sara with me, at my expense, and we could stay over a day or two and see The Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn with its Greenfield Village.

”Can you get time off to go with me to Detroit?”

“I can, but why would I want to go to Detroit?”

“I have to attend a 4 day meeting and thought we could go sightseeing for a day or two.”

“Anything in particular you want to see?”

“Greenfield Village. That’s part of the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn.”

“Accommodations?”

“The Marriott.”

“Ok, I’ll get the time off. I sure hate leaving all of our preps here unattended.”

“I’ll ask Joe and Charlie to keep an eye on the place.”

“No weapons, I suppose?”

“We’ll be flying and I don’t want them in the checked baggage, the bags might get stolen.”

“I don’t like it, but ok.”



## The Preppers – During

I got her a ticket and got us adjoining seats. We packed and drove to St. Louis the night before, staying in a hotel near the airport. The security was extremely tight because of the Red threat level. It's well that we arrived early, it took four hours to board the jet. We took off without a problem and were about halfway to Detroit when I heard engines spool down and stop.

The lead flight attendant went to the cockpit and returned quickly, the engines and electronics were out due to an apparent HEMP attack. To top it off, instead of the usual tail wind, we had a 30 knot head wind. The aircraft was sinking, but apparently the copilot got the flaps partially extended either manually or there was enough reserve hydraulic pressure to do it. I don't know much about airplanes, so I'm guessing.

The jet slowed and the nosed pitched down. I didn't hear the wheels come down, but the pilot seemed to be dumping fuel. The flight attendants then began giving us instructions for an emergency landing. The lead hostess said the pilots were looking for a smooth spot to land – a belly landing and that it should be safe because all the fuel was being jettisoned. Sara had the window seat next to the emergency exit over the wing and I had the middle seat.

The flight attendant gave me an overview of how to remove emergency exit and said, "Once you two are out, run back the direction we came in from (??? I thought she'd say run out from the plane)."

We could see the ground coming up to meet us, or vice-versa and when instructed, braced for the crash landing. We drifted in settling slowly and smoothly into the corn field. It only took me seconds to remove and stow the exit and Sara was out on the wing with me close on her heels. I guess we ran several hundred yards before we stopped and looked around. There was a long string of passengers between us and the plane and the flight attendants were helping some people with minor injuries out of the plane. The pilots were also helping people exit and in no more than a minute or so, the plane was empty. I think that corn field was softer than the Hudson River and they all survived.

A lone Sheriff's patrol car and an ambulance showed up and the EMT's checked everyone over. The Deputy said that busses were on the way for transport. We were near Lafayette, Indiana. The Deputy said that our best bet on getting home was to rent a car and drive to Indianapolis where we could pick up I-70 to St. Louis where we could pick up our car, turn in the rental and return home. He guessed it was about 400 miles and we could make it a little over 5 hours.

We'd taken Sara's beater to St. Louis and left it in long term parking. We were there in 4 hours flat and home less than an hour later. We immediately went into survival mode, moving things from the house to the shelter and locking the shelter down. I connected the AMP-200 and the CD V-717 and we waited.

“How many primers did you buy?”

“Which ones?”

“For the cowboy guns?”

“Ten thousand each large pistol and large rifle.”

“Did you buy components for the other cartridges?”

“Nope. They’re military cartridges and I figured we could get more from a military supply depot.”

“You hope.”

“I hope.”

“How much black powder did you get?”

“None.”

“Then, how are you going to reload?”

“I bought Pyrodex in one pound cans, both pistol and rifle, by the case. Hey, the cowboy guns were your idea. I don’t want to mess around mixing our own black powder unless we don’t have a choice. I also got factory lead bullets, .405 grain for the .45-70 and 255 grain for the .45 Colt.”

“Gas check?”

“We have 12 drums plus what’s in the tanks.”

“I meant gas check bullets.”

“I got the lead bullets the guy at the store recommended. He had to order them in because he didn’t have many on hand.”

The dealer had explained that gas checks were necessary on high velocity ammo with lead bullets, like .357 and .44 magnums, but it was more fun playing dumb. The fact of the matter was that full power .45 Colt bullets would probably be better with gas checks.

“Did you get extra lead and molds?”

“Yes dear, I got it all.”

“Was TOM right?”

“I don’t know, but if you say Lock and Load often enough, you’ll eventually be right.”

“But we had the HEMP that brought the plane down.”

“Sara, it could have been a single device. If it was the right size and exploded at the proper altitude, it could have wiped out most of the country. At 300 miles high, the EMP would cover almost the entire country.”

“I suppose, we didn’t see any mushroom clouds.”

“We’re as safe here as we can be. Our protection factor is off the scale, over one million, and unless we have a very close strike, we’ll be safe. Who knows what will happen next? We have a lame duck in the White House, a Libertarian elected as our next President, and we can’t retaliate until we know who did the deed.”

“Who do you think did it Tom? Russia, China, North Korea, Iran...which one?”

“Yep, any of the above and some others that have nukes and aren’t our best buddies.”

“Surely not the United Kingdom or France. I could see India or Pakistan if they had a delivery system...but do they?”

“You left out Israel, maybe South Africa, Syria or Venezuela.”

“Well, maybe Syria, the Israelis bombed them. South Africa eliminated their weapons, Israel has never admitted to having them and Hugo has a big head.”

“Big mouth too. Not the UK and probably not France. I don’t know...did we launch on ourselves?”

“Even Joe Biden isn’t that petty.”

“You’re right; he’d end up bragging about it.”

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“No radiation yet, what do you think? Leave the shelter or stay?”

“Do we need anything from Rolla?”

“How about a barn, hay, feed and a pair of horses?”

“Sorry...”

"I know, but I've been dying to ask. So how many grains of black powder to reload the .45 Colt?"

"Originally, 40 or 2.6 grams, but the US Army eventually dropped it to 28 grains, about 1.8 grams. I bought loaders for both cartridges. I got them from Lee, a 4 die set for the Colt and the classic for the .45-70 Government. I didn't know you ride."

"Well, I haven't ridden since I met you."

"I haven't ridden since before that. I think the last time I was on a horse was the summer between my sophomore and junior year of high school. We'd better watch out, this is starting to sound like one of TOM's recent stories."

"What do you mean?"

"He has his characters well equipped, usually with .45ACP and 9mm pistols, .308 and .223 rifles, Mossberg 590A1 shotguns plus an assortment of cowboy guns."

"Which caliber cowboy guns?"

"Forty five Colt and .45-70 lever action rifles like the ones we bought."

"See."

"What?"

"He always plans ahead, black powder arms when we run out of smokeless cartridges. What else does he have?"

"A fifty caliber rifle; until recently, he favored the Barrett but he's switched over to the McMillan Tac-50."

"Why?"

"Cheaper and more accurate. Still, they're nine grand."

"It would take a while to save up for one of those. Maybe we could just create a general fund and buy what we wanted when we had enough money. I don't have a problem with another rifle, but given the choice I'd prefer the livestock."

"Well, we could put in a pole building for a barn followed with hay and feed. Then we could get two horses, say mares and some used tack. We already have the scabbards and would only need halters, bridles, saddles and saddle bags."

"Can't carry much in saddlebags. Pack horses?"

“Mules might be better. We’d have to go through our camping gear and make a few changes. Replace some things to reduce weight but not go overboard. Maybe a propane stove and a 20 pound bottle of propane instead of the Coleman dual fuel stove and other things of that nature.”

“Do we have any propane tanks?”

“One, a 20 pounder, which holds five gallons. We could pick up an extra from Wal-Mart. In fact, I think we’ll do most of our shopping there. They probably have most of what we need. Know anywhere we could find horses and mules?”

“You know, I just might. Crap, the phones are out so I guess we’ll have to drive there. Do we need to top off any tanks before we spend what money we have on bug out supplies?”

“Everything is full and I have enough PRI-D to treat an additional 4,000 gallons. Plus I have most of that gallon jug of PRI-G.”

“How much do we have to spend?”

“A little over five grand.”

“So, which first?”

“Wal-Mart, then the livestock followed by hay and grain and finally materials for a pole barn. We’ll check with Joe and Charlie and see if they can lend a hand.”

“Don’t you need to get back to work?”

“Well, I wasn’t schedule back until next Monday. You?”

“The same.”

“You ready to go?”

“Let me hit the bathroom.”

While Sara was getting around, I added my Taurus in the IWB holster and took four extra magazines. I checked her purse and it had the Browning. We dressed for the cooler weather and left for Rolla. We didn’t get much at Wal-Mart. A second 20 pound tank, leather gloves, chili powder and what ammo they had in stock that we could use.

“Where to for the horses?”

“Just west of town.”

We pulled into a farm and I saw a large herd of horses in the field.

“Help you?”

The first thing I noticed was the revolver and the second was the shotgun. “We’re looking for a pair of saddle horses and two pack mules.”

“Anything specific or just a pair of good riding horses?”

“Good riding horses; I doubt we could afford a fancy breed.”

“And mules, you say?”

“I figured they’d do for packing our extra supplies.”

“You need tack?”

“Yes, but used is fine.”

“Got a pair of four year old geldings and more mules than you’d want. Pack saddles or sawbucks?”

“What’s best?”

“Depends on what you’re hauling, personal preference and a bunch of things.”

“We’d be carrying camping equipment, mostly.”

“Ok, sawbucks. Need halters, bridles, saddles and saddlebags?”

“Yes, but good used would be fine.”

“Thirty-five hundred, delivered.”

“That’s bit more than we wanted to spend.”

“What’s your best offer?”

“Three thousand, for everything.”

“Don’t rightly ‘spect I’ll be selling many what with what’s going on. Cash?”

“Cash or check, your choice.”

“Ok, Cash on Delivery. Where to?”

“Steelville. Meet you on the main street, Say 90 minutes?”

“Since you’re going through town, why don’t you cash that check and get the cash?”

“Would you take gold instead of cash?”

“Spot price was \$1,500 an ounce last time I checked. Krugerrands or Eagles?”

“Your choice.”

“Two Eagles.”

“Done.”

We got in the pickup and headed home.

“Where did you get the gold?”

“You know that Kitco account I had when we got married?”

“Yes, we cashed that out.”

“True...but I learned about those investment accounts when I bought some Krugerrands and Eagles from them.”

“Just how much are we talking about here?”

“I only have two of each, all four are one ounce coins. It was our, ‘when all else fails fund’.”

“And you’d spend them on a whim for me?”

“Of course. You’d do the same for me. Besides, there’s a record and if the government ever recalls gold, we’d lose them anyway.”

“But what about the rest?”

“I don’t believe we can erect a barn in the time we have. We can get a load of hay and feed. Have to erect a hasty corral. Might be able to erect a small pole building to keep them out of the weather. I’ll check with Joe and Charlie.”

“Is this over? Can I go back to work?”

“Wait until the first of the week, if you will. We’re supposed to be in Detroit.”

“Are you sure about the horses and mules?”

“This is a heck of a time to ask. Yes, I’m sure. Alternate form of transportation. Might be able to get an old single bottom plow and use the mules to pull it to till a larger garden spot. Saw one in a museum, somewhere close. Can’t remember where at the moment, but it was close by. Let’s stop by Joe’s on the way.”

“Sure.”

“I thought you went to Detroit.”

“We did. The HEMP caused the plane to crash. Pilots dumped the fuel and set it down in a cornfield in Illinois. Almost everyone walked away. Anyway, everyone survived. Need a favor.”

“Name it.”

“Need whatever it will take to erect a corral muy pronto.”

“Poles, finished lumber and a gate?”

“Just get the gate hardware, we’ll build the gate. Can you get Charlie to help?”

“Yeah, everything is shut down waiting until someone tells us what the outcome will be.”

“I can pay for the materials.”

“Reimburse me when we’re done.”

“Check and see what it would take to erect a pole building large enough for 2 mules and 2 horses.”

“How much do you have to spend?”

“Two ounces of gold and five thousand cash. I have to get feed and hay out of that.”

“Man, before the markets closed, gold was near sixteen hundred. We’ll see you when we get there.”

“That guy lied.”

“No, he said the last time he checked. He just got a little closer to his asking price. No way to check prices now with the internet and phones down.”

“I thought you said you wanted mares.”



“Geldings are better for riding and cheaper since they can’t reproduce. If there is a war, we’ll get breeding stock after.”

“You have an answer for everything.”

“More like explaining my thinking not answers. I suppose I should come clean on one thing.”

“What?”

“Those cowboy guns.”

“What about them?”

“I wanted them but hadn’t figured out how to talk you into them. So, I waited and let you talk me into them.”

“You’re sneaky.”

“There’s more.”

“What?”

“How was every Calvary trooper armed during the Indian Wars?”

“He had a Colt Single Action Army revolver, a Springfield carbine and a saber. Oh no, you didn’t.”

“Got them from Global Security dot Org. They had several to choose from so I got the Trooper sabers.”

“Now I feel bad.”

“Why?”

“Because you didn’t get your .50 caliber rifle.”

“The opry ain’t over ‘til the fat lady sings. Don’t worry about it. I’ll find one somewhere should the need arise. We’re here. Let’s get a rope strung to hitch the animals to. There are eyebolts at the corners of the shelter and a coil of rope in the garage.”

“You plan ahead.”

“I get lucky sometimes.”

“Somehow I doubt that applies in this case.”

“Think what you want.”

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It took us two days to erect the corral and small pole barn. Not once during that time did the NWS radio go off indicating an attack. We bought a truckload of hay and another of mixed grain for the horses and mules. We also added straw to the dirt floor of the quickly erected ‘barn’. Finally, several clear channel radios came up and announced that President Biden would address the nation at 9 Eastern. We’d continued to use the shelter at night, just in case.

*My fellow Americans,*

*Four nights past, a nuclear device was exploded over the geographical center of the country at an altitude of approximately 250 miles. The resulting High Altitude Electromagnetic Pulse affected nearly 100% of civilian and 25% of military systems. It will take the country several months to restore systems and in certain isolated cases, longer.*

*We have determined that the source of the detonation was a satellite placed in orbit by China. The Chinese claim the satellite was a weather satellite powered by a small nuclear reactor that failed. We have no evidence to the contrary. China has denied responsibility for the effects on the United States citing ‘an act of God’.*

*Every military and civilian aircraft aloft that night within the reach of the HEMP crashed, generally with significant or total loss of life. Only a scant few aircraft managed to land with no fatalities. It would seem that Sully (Flight 1549) isn’t the only pilot with excellent flying skills.*

*I have ordered the immediate recall of all military troops stationed around the world to assist in maintenance of order and transportation of vital supplies. They will be acting under the orders of local authorities. I have no choice in this matter due to Posse Comitatus. I am in close consultation with President-elect Paul to ease his transition into his new office.*

*In other matters, our Carrier Strike Groups remain on station at their previous positions. China has halted their missile attacks on Taiwan and North Korea has withdrawn its troops from the DMZ. Russian troops remain on location in the Baltic region. Talks have resumed at the Security Council.*

*Thank you and goodnight America.*

We both checked in with work on Monday. Her office was closed due to the power outage. The dealership where I worked had a generator located but it wouldn’t be up for another week and there was a question of whether or not they’d be able to get enough

diesel fuel. The grocery stores were open using generators for electricity and using old fashioned sales books. We limited our purchases to meat, which we canned.

We went riding for the first time and that was enjoyable. I'd never packed a pack animal before and we went back to see the guy who sold us the animals. He gave us a lesson on mounting the sawbucks and balancing the loads. Sara took notes. When we got home, I sorted what we'd pack and figured out how to get it on the sawbuck, balanced. It wasn't as easy as he made it look.

We had a 30" tree to connect 3 appliances to the 20 pound tank and hoses to connect the stove and heater to the tree. The lantern mounted on top. We went with lightweight cooking gear. When it was all said and done, we realized that we'd have to wear the packs or get a third mule to carry them. Then, Sara brought up carrying some grain to supplement the graze should we need to travel. Long story short, we bought two more mules, broken to ride and trained to pack plus the appropriate pack saddles. There was just room in the pole barn for two additional horses after we had 4 mules and 2 horses.

I wasn't thinking when I got her the EMR. What I should have gotten her was the MMR but the EMR had 7,500in<sup>3</sup> and the MMR only 4,200in<sup>3</sup>. Not that it made any difference, we needed the cargo space. What we did do was put the lighter cargo in her pack. With two additional mules, we rearranged the packs to equal weight, about 40-45 pounds each.

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Her office didn't reopen but a week later, the dealership was open and we had a backlog of cars needing new computer units. Depending on the model, there could be a half dozen or more computers to replace plus the entertainment systems. Naturally, the parts ran out quickly and our orders were backordered. We were reduced to sending telegrams to order parts. Western Union was using backup systems. That was interesting because, effective 1-27-2006, Western Union discontinued all Telegram and Commercial Messaging services. Sometimes older is better...

Of course I created quite a stir when I'd shown up the previous Monday. Everyone thought Sara and I'd been killed in a plane crash. I had to explain the whole adventure three times before they told me to come back in a week when they'd have power restored. Power came in the form of a pair of Cummins rental units that were synchronized and fuel from a tanker of diesel fuel.

When I'd gotten our tank, Charlie and Joe went together and bought the other two tanks. Charlie already had one 10,000 gallon tank of stabilized diesel and Joe took one of the two tanks. Charlie said he couldn't afford to fill the second tank and I could have it for what he had in it. What's the scrap value of a fiberglass tank? Less than that! Sara said yes to the tank and we got it installed and plumbed to the first tank. However, all of our money was tied up in livestock and everything associated with it. Filling the tank

would be haphazard at best. She went looking for a different job, but without electricity, no one was hiring.

We were able to add 500 gallons of diesel a month and added a quart of PRI-D each time. It would have been much different if we had a house or car payments. We continued to rotate out the old food and replace it with new, bought on sale. I found that plow I remembered seeing and ask the museum where they got it. Following that lead, I ended back at the same farm that sold us the horses and mules.

“More horses or mules?”

“Neither. I’m looking for a single bottom horse drawn plow with harness for a pair of the mules.”

“You paying in gold?”

“We only had four ounces and it’s all gone.”

“Got any pre-65 silver coins?”

“Some.”

“I’ll take silver.”

“How much for what I want?”

Half dollar rolls contain 20 coins, quarters 40 coins and dimes 50 coins. An uncirculated roll of each contains 0.7234 troy ounces of silver per dollar of face value. Hence, halves contain 7.234, quarters the same and dimes 3.617. All of our silver was new, uncirculated rolls dad had bought when they announced the change for 1965 to 40% silver coins. Fifteen hundred dollars was a lot of money in 1964.

“How much you got?”

“More than I’m willing to spend. The coins are new, uncirculated in the original bank rolls. I want \$32 an ounce for the silver.”

“What would that make a roll of halves worth?”

“Right at \$231.50, same for quarters and \$115.75 for dimes.”

“One roll of each.”

“Sorry.”

“Two rolls of halves or quarters?”

“Nope.”

“Make me an offer.”

“A roll of quarters and a roll of dimes, \$347.25.”

“What are you, a car salesman?”

“Assistant Service Manager.”

“Same difference, I think. The plow has a coat of grease and isn’t rusted. The harness is used but in good condition. You got a disk or drag?”

“Nope.”

“I’ll sell you both for a roll of halves.”

“Done.”

In the end, he got what he wanted, a roll of each. I got good harnesses for two mules, a plow, 2 section disk and a drag. The disk and drag are types of harrows. In past times, after plowing, a disk was used to cut up the rolled soil and a drag was used to level it. For what I spent, I probably could have gotten a good used rototiller. But what would we do if gasoline became difficult to find?

We switched to the septic and added just short of a half cup of Rid-X liquid to the kitchen sink and flushed it with a cup of water. The liquid did a better job than the powder and hopefully we wouldn’t need to pump the tank anytime soon. Our soil was such that anything migrating to the surface would be well filtered. We bought 4 32 ounce bottles at Wal-Mart.

It appeared that the crisis would pass. Our troops came home and our naval forces remained on station. China was still trying to convince the US that the act hadn’t been intentional. January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2013 saw Dr. Ron Paul sworn in as President and another old timer, Colin Powell, as Vice President. Powell was as moderate as Paul conservative. Perhaps that’s what led to their election. Paul must have figured out that he couldn’t get elected without a moderate by his side.

Biden worked with Powell but kept Paul near arm’s length. Nevertheless, Paul started working the first full day after the inauguration and Powell assumed his position as President of the Senate. That role was primarily ceremonial. He could only vote to break tie votes and couldn’t enter into the debates. However, the Senate was almost evenly divided, hence Powell spent time listening to the debates. It beat the dickens out of being Secretary of State.

Our new President had a full agenda and regardless of what one thinks of him, he rolled up his shirt sleeves and got to work. The most pressing issues were the situation with China and Russia. We essentially were maintaining a Mexican Standoff with both countries. Our fighter bombers in Europe were, in part, armed with nuclear bombs. There was no doubt about our boomers and strong suppositions about the SSGNs. Every US Carrier used to carry a nuclear arsenal. All it would take was some event to trigger a GTW. Some suspect the nukes are now carried on the supply ships used in unreps.

Electrical service for the full nation wouldn't be restored during the President's term, but he was trying. Everyone was trying. The Army Corps of Engineers, the CBs, Japan and China geared up to make 60Hz electrical transformers. We didn't get our electrical service back until just before Thanksgiving, 2013. Sara went right back to work and her income made the difference in accumulating the final money needed for the Tac-50 rifle package. Where the rifle previously sold for \$8,999 for the package, it was now \$9,499 for the package and I went the extra \$109 for the Night Force 12-42x56mm Mil Dot scope.

We planned on buying additional magazines one at a time since they were up to \$349 each. Midway had what they claimed was M1022. Their price was \$84.99 for 10 rounds, plus shipping. So, I bought 80 rounds and waited on more magazines. When I bought magazines, I got two at a time. This went back and forth until I had 10 magazines. As we used up our food, it was replaced with like quantities. When I had the 10 magazines, all the gun money went into the M1022. It didn't seem to sell well because of the price. It was ballistically matched to the Mk211MP and I wanted my new rifle to work with both.

The US began rotating Carrier Strike Groups from Taiwan, always keeping the same number, 3, 200 nautical miles east. The Washington and Nimitz were in the rotation now and the Ford was undergoing sea trials. The rumor mill suggested it would go to the Pacific to join the rotation. All of the new Destroyers were assigned to the Pacific and an additional three were well into construction. Congress had seen fit to fund the Destroyer building program through DDG-123. A follow on to the Ford had been funded and the keel lain down. It was unnamed. We'd be up to 73 DDGs unless one was sunk.

These were...interesting times. That's an urban legend about an old Chinese curse if you don't recognize it...May you live in interesting times. We had acquired 500 rounds of the M1022 and shot up 40. I had no idea where I could get my hands on Mk211MP without breaking into a military arsenal. And, I'd only do that as a salvage operation in a PAW. I had a short list of what I wanted from a military arsenal, Mk211MP, M1022, M72A7s, M67s, assorted smoke grenades, concussion grenades and Thernate grenades. While a silencer for the Tac-50 was available from McMillan, it was only sold to the government and Law Enforcement. It was the Elite Iron Suppressor and now went for \$1,345. They were made in Montana.

Oh, I was now the Service Manager and earning \$1,250 a week plus bonuses. Sara had made arrangements to work part time so she had time to tend to our garden and do the canning. We had continued to pick up canning jars at garage sales and had about 1,000

each, pints and quarts. All of our jelly jars were filled, mostly with grape, strawberry and wild blackberry. She got a recipe somewhere to make preserves from the blackberries. The grape was jelly, the other two preserves. We had our own small strawberry patch and could get enough for a year's worth of preserves and several servings to eat over ice cream.

She took root cuttings from the wild blackberry plants and started to encircle our 2.5 acres with the blackberries. Their thorns were something to behold. That got me started on a new project, trees. First, I planted a row of blue spruce seedlings and backed them up with fast growing poplar trees. The blackberry plants were between the two rows of trees. It took the full summer to get the trees planted and for Sara to put in enough root cuttings for the roughly 1,320 feet of our property boundary. We grew our own grapes too, some kind of Concord variety.

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I suppose you're wondering why I decided to call this part of what happened 'during'? That was done in retrospect. I thought about chapters and decided that the situation hadn't lent itself to chapters. There was the portion where we made our original preparations, the period when we were sitting on pins and needles waiting for the shoe to drop and the period after the shoes, plural, dropped. Not all at once, but close enough that some was in during and the rest in after. You heard the joke about the hereafter? I think the original source was Rowan and Martin's Laugh In.

Tyrone: Do you believe in the hereafter?

Gladys: Of course I do!

Tyrone: Good. Then you know what I'm here after!

If you remember Laugh In, you're getting old. And while we're on old, what about that old wives tale that TOM keeps referring to that bad things happen in threes? I'll tell you later whether or not it was true in our case. Meanwhile, back at the acreage...

"Are you going to have enough trees?"

"Don't worry about the trees; are you going to have enough blackberry plants for 1,320 feet?"

"We should be ok. I have 450 plantings and I'll space them about 3' apart. They put up a cane the first year that leans over and we'll end up with a very thick row of blackberries."

"I'm putting in the poplars 3' apart and their branches should mingle. The reason I'm putting in the blue spruce seedlings is because they're long lived and as the poplars die off and I dig out the roots, the spruce will be big enough to take their place. I'm planting the spruce farther apart, 6'. I can add more after the poplars are gone."

"How fast do the poplars grow?"

“As much as 6’ per year once they have a root system.”

“What are we going to do about the opening?”

“Put in a heavy duty pipe gate that opens outward. Charlie and Joe are working on that. If you have any leftover blackberries, we can plant them along the pipe fence.”

“So that’s what we’re creating?”

“Yes, a nice hedge of thorns. It will take about 2 to 3 years to fill in nicely. Later, we’ll be well protected on all sides. As time passes, it will only get better.”

“What size of pipe gate?”

“The size of the pipe or the width of the gate?”

“Yes, both.”

“Six inch pipe forming a gate 10’ wide. It will be set back 10’ from our drive entrance and protected on the sides by a pipe fence.”

“It’s nice to have commercial power back.”

“We sure got our money out of that generator. We averaged one gallon per hour. I’m going to pull it and get it serviced. Joe is a diesel mechanic and we have that rebuild kit.”

“If you’re going to use the engine rebuild kit, you’d better order a replacement.”

“I ordered two. I’d prefer to have them on hand before we pull the genset.”

“Can he rebuild it in place?”

“I’d have to ask him but he may be able to do it since the air intake is on the bottom and the unit is on a stand. We’d just need to move the intake and exhaust pipes and reconnect them after the rebuild is done. Have to do that either way so it’s worth a shot.”

“How long to have both diesel tanks filled?”

“That depends on you. Can you go back to full time after gardening season is over?”

“Yes, I told you.”

“I forgot. Sorry.”



I worked for several weekends on the trees and Sara was either gathering and canning or planting the blackberries. We finished up just in time for the gate to be installed. That went in stages. The first stage was installing the hinge post, the stop post that the gate would rest against when it was closed and the second stop post that it would rest against when it was open. After the concrete was set, the gate was installed and leveled. The open stop post had a simple gate latch but the closed stop post had holes for pins on the gate that went through the post so padlocks could be used to lock the gate shut.

Not even a heavy pipe gate could keep out the most determined person. The point was to slow them down enough for us to get in the shelter if we were home. Late that fall, I did lay out a firing position on the top of the shelter. The top of the shelter was sealed with bitumen. All I had to do was add a few sandbags. Joe rebuilt the engine on site. He also had the 12.5 Quiet Diesel that Charlie had lamented about not getting. Charlie found a buyer for his generator and sold it when he had the money to buy a new QD 12.5.

All of Sara's earnings and most of my disposable income went into filling the fuel tanks. We were getting about 1,500 gallons every 6 weeks and had the original tank refilled and the second tank almost filled within a year.

President Paul withdrew one of the Carrier Strike Groups, cutting the on station number to two. The Chinese troops were still on the shore near Taiwan and weren't indicating any intention to move. The Russians also remained in place. India and Pakistan were at it again over the Kashmir. It was now a three way struggle involving China. India controlled the Kashmir Valley, Jammu and Ladakh. Pakistan controlled Azad Kashmir and the Northern Areas. China controlled Aksai Chin.

It had been announced that the Jimmy Carter was no longer on station off Taiwan but nothing was said about where it went. Its homeport is Bangor. All three of the general class, the Seawolf, Connecticut and the Carter were somewhere in the Puget Sound. I caught the tail end of a discussion on the Fox Channel discussing the two Seawolf class submarines. Yeah, we had TV back, isn't life grand.

Most TV signals are downloaded from satellites. The HEMP did a number on the low orbit satellites below it but the ISS was on the other side of the planet at the time. We had cable meaning that our signal was received from Dish Network and broadcast by the cable company. We could also get DirecTV if we had a dish and a descrambler (set top box). Our cable company also provided our high speed internet service, which still hasn't been restored.

According to the paper, supported by TV, the debate in the UN Security Council now involved only three members, the US, Russia and China. The other two permanent members, France and the UK attended but weren't included in the discussions. If China or Russia introduced a Resolution that the US didn't like, odds favored the UK voting to

sustain a US veto. The reciprocal also applied. That's what made the Security Council so ineffective.

The Plan!

Robin Williams, wearing a shirt that says 'I love New York ' in Arabic.

You gotta love Robin Williams.....Even if he's nuts! Leave it to Robin Williams to come up with the perfect plan. What we need now is for our UN Ambassador to stand up and repeat this message.

Robin Williams' plan... (Hard to argue with this logic!)

I see a lot of people yelling for peace but I have not heard of a plan for peace. So, here's one plan.

1) The US, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand will apologize to the world for our 'interference' in their affairs, past & present. You know, Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, Tojo, Noriega, Milosevic, Hussein, and the rest of those 'good ole boys', we will never 'interfere' again.

2) We will withdraw our troops from all over the world, starting with Germany, South Korea, the Middle East, and the Philippines. They don't want us there. We would station troops at our borders. No one allowed sneaking through holes in the fence.

3) All illegal aliens have 90 days to get their affairs together and leave. We'll give them a free trip home. After 90 days the remainder will be gathered up and deported immediately, regardless of whom or where they are from. They're illegal! France will welcome them.

4) All future visitors will be thoroughly checked and limited to 90 days unless given a special permit! No one from a terrorist nation will be allowed in. If you don't like it there, change it yourself and don't hide here. Asylum would never be available to anyone. We don't need any more cab drivers or 7-11 cashiers.

5) No foreign 'students' over age 21. The older ones are the bombers. If they don't attend classes, they get a 'D' and it's back home baby.

6) The US, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand will make a strong effort to become self-sufficient energy wise. This will include developing nonpolluting sources of energy but will require a temporary drilling for oil in the Alaskan wilderness. The caribou will have to cope for a while.

7) Offer Saudi Arabia and other oil producing countries \$10 a barrel for their oil. If they don't like it, we go someplace else. They can go somewhere else to sell their production. (About a week of the wells filling up the storage sites would be enough.)

8) If there is a famine or other natural catastrophe in the world, we will not 'interfere.' They can pray to Allah or whomever, for seeds, rain, cement or whatever they need. Besides most of what we give them is stolen or given to the army. The people who need it most get very little, if anything.

9) Ship the UN Headquarters to an isolated island someplace. We don't need the spies and fair weather friends here. Besides, the building would make a good homeless shelter or lockup for illegal aliens.

10) All Americans must go to charm and beauty school. That way, no one can call us 'Ugly Americans' any longer. The Language we speak is English...learn it...or Leave...Now, isn't that a winner of a plan?

The Statue of Liberty is no longer saying 'Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses.' She's got a baseball bat and she's yelling, 'you want a piece of me?'

Goodnight Vietnam!

o

On Christmas Eve, 2013, the NWS SAME radio made a broadcast. The message was brief, an Air Defense Emergency had been declared by the guy at Petersen AFB and they were moving to the Mountain. Marine One was seen landing at Andrews and the 747 took off almost immediately.

"I think this is it. You move the stuff to the shelter and I'll tend to the horses and mules."

"But..."

"Shake a leg; we probably have 20 minutes or less. I'll grab the firearms after I'm done with the livestock."

"Wait!"

"What?"

"All I wanted to say was to be careful. I'll take my purse with both pistols. You get the shotgun and your pistols. It's a shame about the horses."

"The pole barn is right above the generator room. I stacked all that hay around and over the building for a reason. I'll just move a few bales and drop the sheets of plastic; it's better than nothing."

We left the food in the basement in the basement. Our food was about equally divided between the shelter and basement anyway. I spent 10 minutes tending to the stock, an-

other five sealing the barn and the last five disabling our vehicles and pulling the radios, plus getting my things from the house. After switching from natural gas to propane, the last thing I did was switch from sewer to septic and from city water to our well. We had nearly completely filled the second diesel tank, giving us a total of 24,000 gallons. The generator engine would last that long. I set the house thermostat to 55° and headed for the shelter.

Sara had brought dinner from the house and it was sitting on the stove. She was making up the queen bed. I locked and bolted the shelter door and went to help. As soon as we finished up, we sat down and ate dinner. The NWS radio, one of three, squealed and died. The remainder of the equipment was in the shelter.

“Did you bring the CB from the house?”

“It’s in the grounded cabinet. Will the house be ok?”

“I hope so. The wind is from the west, 265° so we shouldn’t get any fallout from Whiteman, it’s too far north. I guess we shouldn’t worry about Kansas City and Kansas. If they hit Wichita, Kansas, we’d be right in the path. Every major city in Oklahoma is too far south and the only worry would be if the wind shifted to the northwest. I don’t want to ruin another radio so we might as well leave them disconnected.”

“What do you think Tom, time to lock and load?”

“We will before we leave, that’s for certain. I talked to both Charlie and Joe at different times today; they were both planning on keeping their NWS radios handy.”

“What do you think will happen?”

“To quote TOM quoting Clint Eastwood, improvise, adapt and overcome. Probably link up with Joe and Charlie to improve our chances.”

“Have you talked to them about it?”

“Some. You knew they gave up on forming a MAG. We probably have proportionately more food than they have and better transportation choices. You do know I’ve been making a list of things I’d like to get from a military arsenal in event of something like this happening.”

“Let’s wash dishes and we can go over it.”

“Sure.”

“Ok, I can see the .50 caliber ammo since you have the rifle. Why rockets and grenades?”

“A fragmentation grenade is defensive, a concussion offensive, smoke can be used to signal or provide concealment. The rockets will take out lightly armored vehicles. The Mk211MP ammo is HEIAP or high explosive, incendiary, armor piercing and that expensive M1022 is ballistically matched to the Mk211. Oh, by the way, I’ve sharpened both of those sabers. The .45 Colt ammo is a mix of full power loads and cowboy loads. A 40 grain charge of black powder in the revolvers puts it in the class of a .44 magnum.”

“I’ve got another question.”

“Ok, shoot.”

“I haven’t needed feminine hygiene supplies since the hysterectomy, so what have we continued to accumulate pads and tampons?”

“Trade goods and probably one of the best. Imagine if you hadn’t had the hysterectomy and still needed them.”

“Good idea, very good.”

“I had some other things I wanted but keeping a full supply of feed and filling the tanks came first.”

“For instance?”

“That Jet Suppressor. Drover’s coats and rain slickers. A better set of western boots. Pommel bags. Say, did you remember to save back seed?”

“Some of each, and more than what we’d need for 4 seasons of garden crops.”

“Oh, oh. We’re getting radiation. Why don’t you go lay down and you can spell me around 1 am?”

“Why are you staying up?”

“I’ve got to log the radiation readings until one hour after the peak. Then, I can use estimates of the peak level and figure out the true peak by matching the readings with the results. I can factor in the location of the detonation based on wind direction and speed. That will tell us how long we have to shelter. We can take a very brief look see when it’s down to 0.5R, maybe 15 minutes. I’m glad now that you talked me into that knotty pine wall to conceal the food in the basement. The funny part was the ease of construction. I doubt I spent more than 6 hours getting it up.”

“Assuming you can find what you want at an arsenal, what next?”

“Fuel. Firewood. A dual fuel stove for coal and wood. Coal if we can find it. More fuel stabilizers. We only have 2 gallons of PRI-D left. A coal furnace if we can find one. We only have those 3,000 gallons of propane and 10 cords of dried firewood.”

“Aren’t you going to look for propane?”

“Certainly. And if we find some, we won’t need the coal or the furnace. I’d still like a wood burning stove to setup on the back porch for canning.”

The radiation didn’t peak for several hours. I had suspected Wichita, but this proved it. The average wind speed was around 10mph. It was about 300 miles to Wichita on a heading of 268.3°. We had little if any for the first 29 hours before the needle began to climb. Our peak was 60R. That coincided with 3,000R in Wichita. With the spreadsheet still up, I noted that it would be 68 days before the level was below 0.5R. It wouldn’t drop below 0.1R for nearly 38 weeks and not to 0.05 for 68 weeks. The radiation decay begins when the weapon goes off, not when it reaches you.

I used the exit from the generator room to access the barn. The radiation inside was one twentieth the outside reading. Although I didn’t need to go that often, I made the trip daily to keep the animals settled.

It was 3 weeks before I could raise Charlie and Joe. Their readings were nominally higher than ours. We set up a comm schedule to hookup at noon daily. Salvage operations had to wait until it was safe. We concluded that people might leave shelter, but would get a lethal level of radiation. The limit was supposed to be 300R in 120 days or 2.5R per day. I’d picked up a little going to the barn.

We had a wide range of entertainment running from board games, card games, movies and sex. Well, it’s not like she was going to get pregnant. So we kept ourselves entertained for the full 38 weeks. Then, I suited up and started the cleanup beginning with the house. I washed off the corral and let the horses and mules out for a few hours daily. I mentioned how much difficulty I was having clearing the fallout and Sara began helping. The skies were dark and hazy and there was a chill in the air, much colder than the typical weather.

We had several choices of where to go to get what was on my list, with Lake City way down the list assuming it was still hot. St. Louis was out for the same reason. Which left Fort Leonard Wood. Primarily a training camp, we figured on finding ammo and engineers’ supplies, as in demolitions.

Most of the personnel stationed at the Fort lived off post. We set out with a pickup and trailer, reaching the Fort easily enough and got set up to do a recon. The place was as quiet as a graveyard and looked to be locked up tight. After 3 days of observation, we decided to enter at night, relock the gate and start looking for things on my list and Joe and Charlie’s list. Checking various buildings, we discovered a M107 which Joe took.

Finding nothing further of interest, we began looking for munitions igloos. That took us all night and into the daylight. We hunkered down and had an MRE. We napped for several hours and began looking again in late afternoon. That's when we found the majority of the igloos/ammo bunkers. I was like a kid in a toy store. I set out to find the Mk211 and M1022. The Army had discontinued the M136 AT-4 rocket and there were none to be found. They used a few M-72s and a lot of Javelins.

We did end up with a fair amount of explosives. Then, I found the M118LR, some M855A1 and 9mm. The grenades were in three different bunkers and I took several because they were small (240 fragmentation, 72 concussion, 64 Thermate and several cases of smoke. I was down to the rockets. Joe and I began to check alternate bunkers, breaching anyway necessary. He found the rockets. There were M-72E8s, E9s and E10s. We filled the trailer with those and went back for more grenades. Joe picked up an M240B with multiple cans of ammo. I sure had no intention of getting any full auto weapons. They were of limited use and burned up ammo way too fast.

We left after dark and relocked the gate. On the way home, we met a MNG convoy apparently headed for the Fort. I was afraid we'd get stopped and they'd discover what we'd taken. I'll bet they were surprised when they couldn't unlock the gate. We got lucky and made it home without trouble. Joe and I split the rockets, one case each of the E8s, E9s and E10s. We also split the M1022 but I kept the Mk211. He took two thirds of the grenades and would split them with Charlie. I let him take all the explosives and kept the M118LR.

That was it; he loaded up and headed to Charlie's. Sara kept an eye out while we were unloading and handling the splits. When we finished and I stored our share in the garage, she said to come to the house and wash up, she'd make breakfast.

"Have any trouble?"

"Just finding things. Ran into a Guard convoy on the way back. Had to sweat that out. What about you?"

"No trouble. Spent my time doing an inventory of what we have on hand in the way of foodstuffs. We have more of the of LTS food than I thought. A little over a year of store bought food. I'm not sure where to lump in the stuff from Costco and Sam's Club. We have enough rice to feed a meal to the Chinese Army. Folgers for 3 years. Enough beans to fuel a rocket to the Moon and back."

"Did you list what we have the least of and could stand to have more of?"

"You can never have too much coffee, tea and toilet tissue. We could make our own pasta but if we can find some, why bother? Dry pasta has an infinite shelf life. It's more like the little things...you know macaroni and cheese kinds of things. Occasional purchase things like stuffed olives, cans and jars of nuts, candy bars and so forth."

“Comfort food.”

“Exactly. So did you find the .50 caliber ammo you were looking for?”

“We found everything. Even got you some M855A1 and 124gr 9mm ball.”

“Good. Are we ready to start salvage operations?”

“Not today. I need some sleep and maybe some loving later if you’re up for it.”

“I missed you too. I’ll work on a list and we can prioritize it. I assume you want PRI-G and PRI-D at the top along with diesel and gasoline.”

“Good start. Don’t forget the bath tissue and the coffee. Things like chili powder, gravy mixes.”

“We’ll be taking the pickup and trailer?”

“I imagine, at least at first. Maybe find a U-Haul truck that will run and use one of those plus a trailer. More work but fewer trips.”

I took a shower and crawled into bed. I don’t remember my head hitting the pillow. I remember waking up, but that’s not open for discussion. True to her word, Sara had a list made. She’d contacted Charlie and he’d picked up a 24’ U-Haul truck and their largest box trailer.

“I think our first stop should be our usual store, the one in St. Peters. It’s far enough west of St. Louis proper that the radiation may not be so high.”

“So, what do you want to do? Costco and Sam’s Club first and keep an eye open for tankers?”

“I think so. I radioed Charlie and he brought out the truck and trailer. The gas tank is full so I think we’re good for the round trip without refueling.”

“I agree; it’s only about 100 miles up there. Shouldn’t be much traffic on I-44.”

“I fed the livestock. Get a shower and we’ll leave.”

“What time is it?”

“I woke you at 5am.”

“Must have been more tired than I thought.”



“I’ll get breakfast around and take a shower while you eat. After you eat, set out what you want to take. Do the same for me if you would. Don’t forget your thermals, it’s getting really cold outside.”

“Got it.”

I took a quick shower, skipped shaving, dressed warmly and ate breakfast. When I’d finished, I laid out what I wanted to take, rifle, shotgun, pistol and assorted ordnance. Jumper cables and what we’d might need to start a tanker if we found one, including 50 gallons of diesel. Sara joined me and dawn was just breaking when we pulled out. We took 19 to Cuba and got on I-44. We stopped and checked the north bound tankers and they were all empty, heading back for another load.

We got to the Costco in St. Peters and, while it had been ransacked, there was enough of what we wanted to fill the truck. We went to a Sam’s Club and filled the trailer. Sam’s provided a lot of pasta and Costco all the comfort foods we wanted. On the way back, we checked the south bound tankers. We found two, the first with 18,000 gallons of diesel and a second with 9,000 gallons each of gasoline and diesel. We’d found several 5 gallon cans of stabilizers at a fuel distributor. We could go back there and reload the tankers as necessary.

After we were home and unloaded, I called Charlie on the radio and told him about the empty tankers on the north bound I-44 and the location of the fuel distributor. While the drive up and back had only been about two hours each way, the locating and loading of our bounty took several hours. The unloading took just as long and the basement was filled to nearly overflowing. Our supplies of spices, beverages, pasta and what not had grown to meet our supply of LTS foods. However, we’d left as much behind as we’d taken and after discussing it with Charlie, Joe and Sara, we decided to make a second trip the following day and strike while the iron was hot (blacksmithing expression).

This time, we’d load up on things like tooth paste, razor blades, shaving soap, more bath tissue, batteries, more feminine supplies, and worked over the drug store. I took my Stanley 30” Fubar universal key aka Forcible Entry Tool, one of my first prep items. We shopped a high value clothing store before we left.

The previous day we’d seen not a soul. The hairs on the back of my neck stood more than once the previous day as I got the feeling we were being watched. For that reason alone, we concentrated on food items and bath tissue. I suppose a person could eat toothpaste, but it’s short on nourishment. We decided to let those things wait. The same went for the brands of candy we didn’t usually eat and the tobacco products. On the second day, we cleaned out the bath tissue, candy, and things I mentioned and still had room for more.

When I led them to the fuel distributor, I picked up more PRI-D and G. Then after finishing at Costco, we hit Sam’s again for the final time. We made the one additional stop and headed back. On the way back, I picked up the second tanker with the mixed load. I

wasn't sure the fuel would be there, but I knew the tanker would because of the wire I pulled from the engine. We had to jump this one because the battery was low.

"And I thought the basement was full after we unloaded yesterday. Inventorying this stuff is going to drive me to drink."

"Well, you can't say we don't have enough liquor, but don't go overboard. I suppose that meat was probably good, but I just didn't want to take the chance. The bacon and hams, the tuna and so forth won't be a problem."

"We need another storage building. Could we build something like the barn to store the dry goods in?"

"I'm sure we can. I'll have to talk to Joe and Charlie. They may have the same problem after they've hauled all of the fuel and start in on grocery items. There wasn't much left at Costco, but Sam's still had plenty. I wouldn't feel comfortable taking any more, it might go bad before we could use it up and it would almost be like hoarding."

"And we're not now?"

"No, we're just filling the holes in our preps that we didn't have the money to do before the attack."

"I ran the amateur band while you were at the Fort. I heard people from all over the country. Probably some of them were foreign too, I didn't know the language. I recognized the French and Spanish. There was some language that sort of sounded like Spanish but wasn't."

"Probably Portuguese, either Portugal or Brazil. It's the official language in 9 or 10 countries."

"Could be. What's next?"

"Tomorrow we'll complete the inventory and decide what we store where. If there's time, I'll go into Rolla and see about materials to build a storage building."

"You know, it should be warming up this time of year. If anything, it's getting colder. If it doesn't start warming soon, we're not going to have a garden. Be different if we had a greenhouse, even a small one."

"I don't know of any place in Rolla that sells greenhouses. TOM wrote about some place in Texas called Texas Greenhouse. Uh...Fort Worth, I think."

"How far is it to Fort Worth?"

"Five, six hundred miles."

“That would take two or three days, one way. Let’s wait for now. We have more than enough canned goods.”

After we completed the inventory and input the information into the spreadsheet Sara had made, we went through the list marking what had to be protected against freezing. It continued to cool at a slow rate.

I decided that we could use a pole building 5 sheets (20’) wide by 8 sheets (32’) long. I would need a total of 26 sheets for the sides and more for the roof. How much would depend on the pitch. If it was 1:1, we’d have overhead storage with the center being 10’ high. That allowed me to calculate that it would take a total of 32 sheets for the roof plus the 26 for the sides.

We’d also need a door. We would need about 58 poles. My thinking was that the sheets would be the size of plywood, 4’ by 8’. I wasn’t sure what to use for joists in the overhead, 2”x6”? Plus I’d need rafters and decided to just go with 2”x10” all around and ¾” plywood or OSB for the overhead floor. Better to over build than under build.

Joe and Charlie continued to haul fuel from the distributor until all the empty tankers they found were filled and stabilized. I got them to help with the storage building materials before they returned to get food. They even helped dig the post holes before they took off. They found an empty 53’ box trailer and could use one of the semi tractors to haul it around while they gathered food.

I picked up a pickup load of Sackrete to cement the poles in place after they were in and braced. It took Sara and me from dawn to dusk to complete that task. The concrete would have to set a week before we could even consider doing anything more to the building. We used their fast setting product that was intended solely for posts or poles. They claimed it would set in ½ hour. Maybe, but it was cold outside.

After the week was up, we added the sills and built up plates and began attaching the metal siding. Next we installed the joists and a collapsible stairwell. By then, Joe and Charlie could help and we put in the rafters and roof. They had about 4 hours after we’d finished installing the door and we added lower floor and upper floor lights. That didn’t take long and they helped me move things until dusk. Both said they’d radio when they were ready to erect their own storage buildings.

About the time Joe and Charlie finished up their storage buildings, the MNG showed up in town. They had several things they wanted to discuss with the local authorities. First, who needed help and what kind of help did they need? Second, were the local officials aware of anyone in the area that might have gone to the Fort and helped themselves? Third, was there any evidence of locals having cleaned out the grocery stores and hoarding?

The locals were aware of Joe and Charlie's trips to St. Louis because they saw the tankers. Sara and I had gone north out of Steelville on local roads and got on I-44 the first chance. Therefore, no one was aware of our two trips collecting food. The locals also were aware of the three of us each building a storage building because we'd been seen collecting building materials. Since no one had complained about the building materials we weren't too worried about that.

Since Steelville was having water and sewer problems in addition to the lack of power, phones, etc. no one complained that we were on septic or using our own well concealed well. The 'loot' from the Fort was well hidden under some bales of hay for the horses and mules and not in the gun cabinet in the shelter or in the house. We had acquired more baled hay (small bales) and it was stacked everywhere. As a whole, we had everything we wanted or needed except a greenhouse.

When we had that, we could call it good and sit back a rest on our laurels. I knew from the fiction about the cool white warm white bulb thing for substitute grow lamps. We'd need fixtures and bulbs for that. However, I was sure our generator could handle it because of the previous average fuel use. At full power, it would have been closer to 1.33gph.

We used the road atlas and mapped our route. I-44 to exit 283 in Oklahoma. South to US 69. Pick up TX-121 north of Dallas and take it to Fort Worth. Find a yellow pages and a local map and go to Texas Greenhouse. Load the largest they have that will fit on the flatbed and reverse course. Get home without getting killed and assemble the greenhouse. Simple, yes?

It was relatively simple until we were on I-44 in Oklahoma returning home. The ground began to shake so hard I had to pull off to the side after taking my foot off the fuel pedal and coasting to a stop.

"New Madrid? Yellowstone? What?"

"Probably one of the above. However, we have to wait for the sound. If we don't hear any, I'd vote for New Madrid. Yellowstone would be so loud they could hear it in New York City."

"If there were anyone alive in New York to hear it."

"There is that."

"We did hear a sound, but much softer than the authors described in Patriot Fiction. We waited for 30 minutes for any aftershocks and drank a cup of Earl Grey from the Stanley 2 quart thermos. I put the pedal to the metal and we continued northeast. Since I didn't know what the source of the shaking and sound was, we weren't really traveling all that fast, 40mph. On the other hand, with the load we had, we couldn't stop if we came to a downed bridge.

I was absolutely exhausted and we parked the semi, had a sandwich, showers and went to bed. If there were any more tremors during the night, we missed them. We got up, showered, dressed and had breakfast. Joe came on the radio calling for us ahead of the scheduled time and he sounded excited.

"I'm here Joe, come back."

"We were worried about you. Have any problems?"

"Not down or there. But about the time we got back on I-44, we had to stop because of an earthquake. What happened, New Madrid again?"

"Not this time."

"Yellowstone?"

"Nope."

"Is it a secret?"

"You aren't going to believe it. This is so good you'll never believe it."

"I'll believe, give."

"I'll give you a hint. California."

"San Andreas?"

"Nope."

"I give up. Last chance or I turn off the radio."

"Ah...you're no fun. It was the Long Valley Caldera. Estimates we've heard on the radio put the amount of ash higher than the previous eruption. That author TOM is probably up to his hind end in ash. This eruption possibly went over 1,000km<sup>3</sup>."

"That's about 240mi<sup>3</sup>. Officially or guess work?"

"Do you know anyone who was around the last time it erupted? Guesswork, obviously. That observatory they had there hadn't been staffed since the HEMP attack. We lost a lot of geologists in the HEMP attack and the war. I've been hearing some speculation on the amateur bands but nothing specific. We should start getting ash soon if it was as big as they claim. That Bishop Tuff covered most of Missouri to some extent."

"It couldn't have been too deep."

“It wasn’t according to what I’ve heard. The thing is that it doesn’t take much to really mess up an engine. I don’t know if we’ll have time to erect that greenhouse before it gets here.”

“That can wait. We can just leave it sitting on the flatbed and get to it another time. Anyway, if there is ash in the air on top of the residual effects of the war, we couldn’t grow anything without grow lights. I know about the warm white cool white thing so all we need is the fixtures. I figure the generator will power all the lights.”

“Give Sara my best. I’m clear.”

“Me too.”

Don’t like our radio procedures? So sue me. Better yet, have the FCC come and give us a ticket and bring some things we need when they come. The reason we didn’t have any trouble in Fort Worth was because we found a flatbed with a 30’x60’ Classic already loaded and we just switched trailers. Couldn’t find any assembly instructions either. My Stanley Fubar wasn’t up to the task of breaking in and I didn’t want to stick around too long.

Idiot that he sometimes was, Joe got Charlie and they loaded up on the 2 bulb, 40w fluorescent fixtures and all the warm white bulbs they could find. They had no trouble finding cool white and even had some grow lamps. They brought the fixtures, bulbs, a switch box, 2 switches and two boxes of 12 gauge Romex and a spool of 8 gauge to feed the switches. They had enough fixtures for a total run of 240’. When the greenhouse was erected, they said, we could repay them by allowing a small area for growing.

We figured from the road atlas that the distance from Long Valley to Rolla and Steelville was roughly 1,500 miles, line of sight. Assuming a wind speed of 10mph, would put the ash here in 150 hours or 6 days and 6 hours. Assuming a wind speed of 15mph, cut that to 100 hours or 4 days and 4 hours, both from the time of eruption. Worse, the rough heading from there to here was nearly east.

Joe and Charlie went back to Rolla and came back two hours later with every mechanic from the shop and every plumber from where Charlie worked. They also brought an electrician, a trencher, a truckload of Sackrete and pipes to add water to the greenhouse and schedule 40 drain pipe. In a little over 20 minutes they had a string outline, squared up, and were running the trencher for an 18” deep footing.

People were assembling sections of the greenhouse as it was being unloaded from the flatbed. Joe told me he had two guys from the glass shop in Rolla coming out to glaze the glass during and after installation. Sara started an urn of coffee and started slicing a cure 81 ham for sandwiches. We had cheese in the refrigerator and more in each freez-

er. One of the double buy items was mayonnaise. She sliced what bread we had and started a new batch after she had the ham and bread sliced.

I got the second coffee urn out of the shelter and started a second batch of coffee. Coffee urns were something we frequently saw at garage sales and at the price... It didn't look like enough ham to me and I started slicing a second ham. If it was too much, we could freeze it. The Sackrete was set in two hours and they began to mark and drive bolts with a Ramset. By dawn, the framework was in place. Everyone knocked off for a while until the guys from the glass shop showed up to give instructions.

They pulled in around 8am and explained the steps involved in installing the glass, glazing clips and seals between the glass panels. By 10am they were glazing the glass as fast as two men could work. Around noon, two more glazers showed up and spelled them so they could eat. Meanwhile, the 8 gauge was run into the greenhouse, the fixtures hung and wired and Charlie and his buddies had the water and drain in.

The greenhouse was complete well before any sign of ash appeared. A couple of guys went back to Rolla and got lumber and started building tables to hold the plants. Never in my life had I seen anything like that. Both Sara and I were shaking hands and saying thank you to anyone and everyone.

"Don't worry about it Tom, friends do."

We actually had time to get into Wal-Mart and get pots and soil mix to start the seeds. We realized afterwards that there hadn't been the big rush to get the greenhouse done so much as to get it done in time for the rest to prepare for the expected ashfall. After we had all of the seeds started, we got some much need rest.

There was still no sign of ash the next morning so we saddled up the horses and went riding. It wasn't the smartest move because the temperature was only in the low 40s and it was flat out cold. Fortunately that side trip the second time we went to St. Louis was a western apparel store. We'd loaded up on jeans and shirts, both got really good boots and got Australian drover's coats with the fleece lining. The rain slickers were right out of the movies, yellow. The jeans and denim jackets were Wranglers and we selected lined and unlined jackets. We'd also managed to get good, lightweight leather gloves and new Resistol hats with plastic rain covers. The hats were the Double Eagle and natural colored. We called it quits early due to the cold. I can tell you we had no problems getting the horses into the barn. During the time we'd been riding, the temperature dropped 4-5° F. It was now hovering just above freezing.

Just so you know, I'd looked at the hats at an internet store before the HEMP. The Double Eagle was their top of the line felt hat and listed for \$2,000. Considering some of the prices on things in the store, it was one of those, 'if you have to ask the price, you can't afford it' places. Even those cheesy looking George Strait hats ran almost \$200. I'm talking about the hats, not his music. I actually liked his music, a lot. Do you suppose

he's at Marina Del Ray? IIRC, he has a home in a gated section of northwest San Antonio and a ranch about 50 miles southwest of San Antonio.

The following day there was dust in the air. It was light at first, becoming heavier through the day. The previous eruption, according to the USGS, had lasted over a period of six days. Keep in mind that they weren't there. Hams in the path of the ash cloud began dropping off the air allowing us to track the progress.

Since it was nearly impossible to keep the fine dust out, we moved to the shelter and changed the pre-filter that had been exposed to radiation. We had one complete filter set and 4 extra pre-filters because they were the cheapest of the 3 filters. If we need to go out, we had a choice between the gas mask or an N-95 disposable filter and eye protection.

We took turns slipping out daily for a minute to check the amount of ash in the air. Ten days after it began, it started to lessen. Enough so that we could go to our new greenhouse and water the emerging plants. There was, at most, an inch of ash in some places while many were completely free of ash. I suppose the wind had blown it off. We were ready for a break; we'd had the HEMP, the war and now Long Valley. That's three, right?

Around the globe, Nature was exacting revenge for mankind's ravages. Although the war hadn't focused on geographical targets as some had feared, the effects were felt deep within the planet. The planet was never fully at rest. There were fault lines, subduction zones, volcanoes, and currents like the Gulf Stream and others. The industrialized world dumped its share of gasses into the atmosphere, Freon, carbon dioxide and more than I can name. I had followed the discussion concerning global warming versus new ice age at a distance. Couldn't do much about it, anyway.

The war, of course, changed that to an extent. There was a lot of smoke and whatever in the atmosphere. It was probably part of the reason for the lower temperatures. We thought that would pass. It would have but for Long Valley. Sooner, anyway. Some of that ash might remain in the air and circle the globe. A volcanic eruption can really change the weather, it gave us *Frankenstein*. It was caused by the eruption of Mt. Tambora in Indonesia, halfway around the world.

Some of this I learned in school, some I picked up at the forums and did my own research before the HEMP and now it was a matter of direct observation. That greenhouse ended up helping a lot of people but especially those who had helped assemble it and get it functioning. Sara and I didn't forget who helped and while we had limited means, we shared from the greenhouse and even some of our other food stores. Many of the surviving women were extremely happy with some of those trade goods we offered.

As fuel was used up, more was sought and brought back. Eventually, because of us and others, the supply at the fuel distributors was exhausted. By then, some locals were



producing oil crops in addition to their regular grain crops. Chemicals were salvaged here and there, primarily menthol alcohol and sodium hydroxide. It wasn't as easy to get the lye as once was the case. Drano wasn't pure sodium hydroxide and Red Devil was gone. But it was out there and just had to be located. Ethanol could be used as a substitute for methanol. Some biodiesel producers did well, growing corn for ethanol and canola for biodiesel. The resulting leftovers made excellent livestock feed.

Since much of the production used wood or coal as a heat source, the production was energy positive. Granted they were burning some high sulfur coal, but wood was a renewable resource. Speaking of wood, we eventually located a wood burning stove. With Joe and Charlie helping, a slab was poured and a cover erected. Since I had the two chainsaws and they had their own, we went to various portions of the Mark Twain National Forest to collect deadfall and dead standing wood.

One section of the forest was just down the road and another southwest of Rolla. I preferred to avoid the one southwest of Rolla because it was the home of the Fort. The MNG never found whoever it was that broke into the Fort and made off with a rifle and, according to them, tons, of ordnance. A half a ton, maybe, get real. Anyway, they were missing M-16s, M-9s, thousands of magazines, hundreds of thousand rounds of ammo and every single explosive they had. I had to chuckle at their claims, in private of course.

The poplars didn't do as well as I thought and I ended up pulling them out. I added a second row of blue spruce seedlings we grew in our greenhouse. The blackberries, on the other hand, produced a hedge almost too thick. The only way to harvest the berries was to literally wrap your arms in multiple layers of protection. Joe's wife, Mary, and Charlie's wife, June, began helping with the jelly and preserves. Each family got a share and the leftovers were highly sought for at the weekly trade fairs.

We took a half step back in history; a butcher shop opened and produced beef, pork and chicken products. The grocery stores were mostly limited to dry goods produced locally. The dealership was still there, for repairs. Parts were a problem and only old model vehicles were being used with parts coming from various auto salvage yards.

It was about 4 years after Long Valley that California had the 'Big One'. While we didn't feel it, it was felt several states to the east, including western Kansas. We still had a government, a very limited government. We no longer had an Air Force because there were no planes left that were safe to fly. We had an Army, but it was a shadow of its former self. Equipment like the Abrams and Bradleys' were repaired one last time and stored, just in case.

## The Preppers – After

I'll remind you of the hereafter joke. Anyway, we got home just driving steadily. The government lacked the money to keep all those welfare programs going. It couldn't even fund the Navy. The ships were held in reserve, many being stored in fresh water rivers to reduce the corrosion. Their aircraft were still flyable and kept on the carriers, moth-balled. We could fight another war, but it would be more like WW I, if that.

Charlie, Joe and I had a list of Cummins distributors and we went from one to the next collecting filters, parts, additional QD 12.5s and so forth. We noted everything available at the distributorships and passed the word. For many, they had adjusted to a lifestyle without electricity and they couldn't produce or afford fuel so they didn't bother.

The farmer who raised horses and produced the mule died in the war. His storm shelter simply didn't provide enough protection. We rode over and led a string of fillies and colts back to our place. The pole barn was enlarged and we got feed using the money we earned selling the things we produced. I found those two Eagles and the silver coin rolls and many more of each when we checked out the storm shelter and then the house.

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Our 2.5 acres was square, 330' per side. The aboveground shelter was near the center of the lot. From that firing position atop the shelter, we had clear shots in any direction, limited only by the poplars. Sara had learned to shoot my M1A, adjusting to the slight increase in recoil. With my Tac-50, I could cover much of Steelville. As a rule the gate was kept closed and at least one padlock in place. The padlocks were Master model 177, bumpstop, shrouded, set-your-own-combination, brass padlocks.

Was our life too tame for you? Oh, we had our moments. Remember that our large lot was surrounded by blackberries. A thorny protector that produces a very tempting fruit. We had people trying to pick it just as it began to ripen and most would leave when confronted. But, there was that *it's not fair that you have it and we don't* mindset.

That didn't stop with the fruit. It applied to everything we had. As preppers, Joe, Charlie and I were better off than most of the people in the area. We were willing to take certain risks to get some things we needed or wanted that weren't immediately available. Somewhere like 1345 Thunders Trail, Potomac. Montana. Who is there, you ask. Elite Iron. It was a long drive and there was some questions about whether or not it was worth the time, risk, fuel and so forth.

When we'd had enough trying to deal with all those who resented what we had, Joe and I headed to Montana. It turned out to be about 1,600 miles, one-way. We made our way to Sioux Falls, SD and headed northwest. We used a 6-on, 6-off driving schedule and stopped at night. During the daylight hours, we'd take turns driving in two hour stretches. One of the sights we passed was the Little Bighorn Battlefield site. We didn't stop.

Since the firm manufactured a variety of suppressors, we took a variety of suppressors, as in every one we could find. If you're going to get shot for looting, you might just as well give them a good excuse. In my view, a suppressor, while nice, is in the category of a TV, a non-necessity. Not to mention illegal in Missouri before. Probably after, too; but nobody was worrying about things like that.

After hearing how much had been taken from the Fort, my attitude about some things changed. I figured that some of those Guardsmen probably discovered the looting and did a little of their own. There was, after all, no one to say otherwise. Joe and I would never comment on that trip. We didn't much comment about our trip to Montana either. But, before it was all said and done, none of us had a rifle that didn't have a suppressor, even down to the Marlin 39As. Check that, the Vaqueros and the Marlin Cowboys didn't.

I reloaded some of that .45 Colt ammo with the Pyrodex just to see what it was like. Smoky was an understatement. Shouda got some smokeless. And, speaking of TVs, our 32 inch gave up the ghost and I'd seen a nice 40 inch flat screen at the Costco in St. Peters... No, there was no TV signal, but we had a lot of movies and there was nothing like a cold drink and a bowl of hot popcorn on a lazy night. We had more after we started swapping and checking various closed stores, like video stores. We had to hunt for a while before we found a working Blu-Ray player.

It may not have seemed like it to some, but in a way we were still preparing. Planting the second row of blue spruce was one example. Driving to Montana to get things we wanted another. Replacing the TV and locating the Blu-Ray player was for our future entertainment. There wouldn't be another GTW any time soon, but there would be storms, maybe even blizzards. Rivers would still flood when filled with snow melt. The volcanoes around the world would continue to erupt from time to time adding more ash to the air and reducing the sunlight here and there.

The trip to Montana took the last of our spare gasoline, leaving only enough to cut wood. Propane was becoming harder to find and would someday become unavailable unless they got a refinery up and running. Diesel vehicles would eventually stop running for want of replacement parts. Even with the extra generators, filters and rebuild kits we'd need another source of electricity or join the ranks of those doing without.

So, we prepared. We found quality oil lamps and extra wicks, sometimes by the roll. Charlie, Joe and I spent a month or more locating wood burning stoves. We kept our eyes open for wood burning furnaces and wood burning hot water heaters and find them we did. They were outdoor units and if properly tended to, kept the water hot all the time. In fact the hot water heater and wood furnace was solved in a single unit.

Outdoor Wood Boilers (OWBs) are known by various names: outdoor wood furnaces, outdoor wood-fired hydronic heaters, outdoor wood water heaters or waterstoves. Whatever they are called, these residential or small commercial wood burning hot water heaters are used to heat homes and domestic hot water, heat swimming pools and hot tubs, heat hot water in milk houses or to keep greenhouses warm. These heaters have

large fireboxes and are hand-fed typical firewood or larger un-split wood. They come in a variety of sizes and shapes. Most look like small freestanding metal tool sheds with stacks, but some are rectangular boxes or are cylindrical in shape. The fireboxes are surrounded by water jackets and the hot water is circulated in underground insulated pipes from the OWB to the house or other structure that may be as much as 100 feet or more away from the OWB.

And, Charlie was a plumber. Not wanting to give up on electricity, we found 48VDC wind turbines and racks of batteries. We added charge controllers and inverters for the day when we would rest the generators. Our three families discussed the subject of the generators and concluded that each family would have one new QD 12.5 backing up the primary unit and that as soon as we could convert to wind, we'd do so, saving the generators for the next emergency when we had to rely on them.

In the same vein, we worked with some of the farmers producing biodiesel, accumulating what we could to mix with our diminishing supply of petroleum diesel. Fortunately a 55-gallon drum of kerosene would fuel oil lamps for years should we have to use them. There would those times in the future where there wasn't enough wind to produce electricity and/or charge the batteries. We looked at each question from a dozen different directions. While I had demonstrated the ability to reload the .45 Colt and later the .45-70, there was nothing wrong with looking for more commercial ammo of those calibers, and we did.

Perhaps one of the reasons our little piece of heaven was never attacked was our constant practice with our firearms...without the suppressors. If someone wanted to conclude we were practicing to maintain our proficiency, we sure weren't going to argue the fact. We were doing so, but it went beyond that. We were announcing to anyone within hearing range that we had the means to protect what we had.

We had a few complaints about the smell of the manure from our herd, but that same manure was composted and worked into the garden soil, greatly increasing the yield. It may have the side benefit of diluting the effluent from leech field, but there was no way to tell that. More than one person was surprised when they discovered we had running water and operating sewer thanks to that illegal well and septic tank.

We made some good choices when we could and elected to accept advice where it was offered and applicable. What city ordinance against horses on residential property? That's ridiculous! The next thing you know you're going to tell me I can't raise blackberries or blue spruce. I know, but they're growing and will eventually fill in. Count yourself lucky, you won't be able to see our garden or well. Besides, they won't get too big, they prefer altitudes much higher than 795' above sea level.

Back to the results of the Montana trip. Of course we practiced without the suppressors, some of the time. Other times when we were out and about, they were installed on the rifles, in plain view. It sent a message of a sorts...you might end up with holes in you without anyone hearing. Of course in the event that someone actually did end up with

bullet holes in them without anyone hearing, we knew who they'd blame first. The only deviation from that was the Alpha suppressor on the Tac-50. Once installed, it stayed on the rifle. There were two reasons: one the rifle was really loud; and, two, I didn't want to change the sighting that might occur between having it on and off.

We had the chance to get a pair of Shepherd puppies and did so. They weren't free, of course, being purebreds. They were intelligent dogs, the seller provided obedience training, for a fee. There was enough difference in coloring to tell them apart. Sara took Bravo and I took Delta. Well...they had to have some kind of names. That was the order of their birth, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>. Unlike other breeds, the Shepherds are family dogs as opposed to single person dogs like the Doberman. Thus, both dogs appointed themselves as family protectors regardless of who spent the most time with them individually.

We added fencing on the inside the pipe gate to keep them from getting out but otherwise allowed them free reign on the property. They were better than any kind of electronic alarm we could have devised. That was the final straw so far as others picking blackberries went. The harvest became so bountiful that not only Mary and June helped but the teenage children helped. Joe had two teenagers and Charlie one. The young women didn't seem to mind but the young man seemed to think it beneath him. Only the popularity of the blackberry preserves kept him at the task.

"We're going to have to limit the jelly jars to grape jelly and strawberry preserves. We have enough extra pints to use them for the blackberry preserves. I'm sure glad we found those extra jars in that warehouse. At first I was disappointed that all they had were two cases of quarts and all those pints. I think now that it may to our advantage."

"The thing that pleased me most was those caps. I know they're only intended for replacing the lids after you open a jar but they've been perfect with the jellies and preserves. I couldn't believe our luck finding 80 cases; each containing 12 boxes of 8 caps."

"It's like I told you at the time, I think whoever ordered mistook the caps for lids or figured they'd sell a box of caps for every box of lids they sold. Our lids are getting a little iffy, we're up to a 15% failure to seal rate."

"Is it the jars or lids?"

"We check the top edge of the jars carefully and discard any with nicks."

"So you think it's the sealing compound on the lids?"

"Don't you?"

"Probably. We might try to find some of those older style rings and caps. You know the ones; they had a ceramic seal inside a one-piece zinc lid and a rubber ring around the base of the lid. I know they still make the rubbers, Canning Pantry had them."

“Are we talking about another road trip?”

“Probably, but not as far as Montana. I think the rings have a better storage life if stored properly.”

“I’ll put out the word that we’re looking for the old fashioned zinc caps. If they haven’t thrown them away, some people may still have some.”

“I’ll see if we can come up with enough gas for a trip to Utah.”

“Are we that low?”

“Four drums and I think the PRI-G is beyond its shelf life. No promises but we’ll try.”

“Have you thought about metal cans?”

“Canning Pantry had the sealers, but not the cans or lids. I think I recall them listing two sources of cans, Container Supply or something like that in Garden Grove, CA and one in Lincolnwood, IL, House of Cans. As long as you’re putting the word out about the old fashioned caps, ask for jars, jelly jars, pints and quarts. I look for the can sealer, more jars, rings and lids. Maybe they stored the lids in a climate controlled section in the warehouse.”

“And if they didn’t?”

“I was thinking about getting some dehydrators. I should probably do that anyway. Joe, Charlie and I can go, take that 53’ box trailer. We’ll probably take a few extra things in case we run into trouble.”

“Tom, we decided a long time ago that we’d salvage, but not take from others. How are you going to pay for things we want if there is someone there?”

“Well...I have the fifteen hundred face value of silver and the gold from that horse trader. It will be enough, hopefully. Gas won’t be a problem taking a semi that it would have been otherwise. Might even find a tanker load of gas and some fresher PRI-G. Even a little bit would help if we limit it to the chain saws.”

“When are you going?”

“Tomorrow or the day after. I looked it up on the map, it’s north of Salt Lake City off I-15.”

“Joe, I need a meet with you and Charlie, ASAP.”

“What’s up?”

“Food preservation and the lack thereof.”

“We’ll be there in less than an hour.”

“What’s the problem with preserving the food?”

“Apparently the lids are starting to fail to seal. Sara and I talked it over and I want to take a run out to Canning Pantry.”

“We’re getting low on gas.”

“I thought we’d take a semi and that 53’ box trailer. Load some extra drums of diesel so we’ll have it if we need it. We’re going to look for a load of gas and some PRI-G while we’re at it.”

“When do you want to go?”

“Tomorrow?”

“Joe, Tom, the sooner we go, the sooner we get home.”

“Fellas, take some of that ordnance we picked up at the Fort.”

“You expecting trouble?”

“Maybe, maybe not; I’d just prefer to have it.”

“What if we have to pay?”

“I have fifteen hundred face value in 90% silver coins and some gold I picked up.”

“Mary and I have a little of each, too. Charlie, don’t June and you have some?”

“Quite a bit actually. A thousand face in junk silver and 6 ounces of gold, Krugerrands.”

“Then is tomorrow ok?”

“Fine by me. Charlie?”

“Let’s do it.”

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I knew that the Mason jars had been manufactured in Muncie, Indiana. “Probably,” I thought, “somewhere that had been nuked. No way to find out where else they make

them.” (Ball Corporation moved its corporation headquarters to Broomfield, Colorado in 1998 and they’re made there.)

Had we been thinking, we’d have taken a different route than that which appeared to be the shortest truck route. We ran into ash from Long Valley in a few places and had to detour. We took enough diesel fuel with us for the semi and enough for a second semi in case we found that load of gas.

It took us 3 days to get to Hyrum. It’s a small town east of I-15 north of Salt Lake City. Had to hunt around before we found the warehouse and then break in and then find what we were looking for and load it. We had spotted a Chevron Tanker on the north-bound lane of I-15 and intended to check it on our return trip. After we finished in Hyrum, we headed out of town. We found an abandoned motel and put up for the night.

The next morning we fired up the tractor and headed south to check out the tanker. It was still in the same place and the battery was dead. We dumped the fuel from the saddle tanks and refilled it with stabilized diesel. If that bothered the Mormons, they were just going to have to get over it. Next, we dropped the trailer and took the tractor across the median and hooked up the jumpers. It moaned and groaned and finally caught. It was running rougher than a cob. We took the 5kw generator and the small air compressor and aired up the tires. They had all kinds of weather cracks.

After twenty minutes or so, the diesel engine on the Tanker tractor was running pretty smooth. Charlie climbed in and drove off north to the exit so he could turn it around. Joe and I took our tractor back across the median and hooked it up to the trailer. When Charlie got back, we tagged along behind him as we headed for home. We’d done well in Hyrum. Getting jars, lids, a manual All American can sealer, caps, 3 additional 41.5 quart All American pressure canners, pickling spice mixes, tomato sauce mixes and pectin. We also got 2 more grain mills and extra parts.

We stopped that night somewhere in Nebraska and took rooms in an empty motel. The next morning, there were several people around the tanker and the box trailer. One guy was on top of the tanker checking the contents. Another was trying his best to cut the lock off the trailer. We selected the shotguns as our primary weapon with the rifles slung and pistol flaps or restraining straps loose.

“What do you think you’re doing?”

“What’s in the tanker?”

“Stale gas.”

“What in the trailer?”

“Canning supplies.”



“Where’d ya get it?”

“From a warehouse selling those types of goods.”

“The tanker?”

“Abandoned along the highway.”

“We’ll be taking them.”

“You’ll be taking a load of buckshot.”

“We have you outnumber 4 to 1.”

“Which makes us more desperate. Now!”

It lasted only seconds. We collected the weapons and put them in the cab of the Chevron tractor. We stripped the dead taking anything of value. One of the living asked, “What are you going to do with us?”

“Nothing. Pat you down, take your stuff and leave you lay.”

“That’s cold.”

“Life is hard. You picked the wrong 3 men to hassle this morning. I realized some time back that not putting people out of their misery was meaner than killing them and when people get me really PO’d I lose all sense of charity.”

“Hey this one has a tube gold Eagles.”

“Empty your pockets.”

“You want them emptied, you do it.”

“Sure.”

I pulled my knife and cut them open not worrying too much about cutting the guy a little. It was a copy of Rambo III. Big heavy sucker, blade and false edge both as sharp as a straight razor. It had taken many of those hours in the shelter when we had the war. Sara’s was a Rambo II, the one with the black blade. I also had Rambo I, it was just as sharp.

We had other knives, too, plus the Trooper’s sabers. A pair of Cold Steel Laredo Bowies, 24” Latin machetes, good pocket knives, Swiss Army Knives, and single bladed folding knives. We both had a dual case that held the folding knife and the Leatherman. Another case held a Mini Maglite, the one with two AA batteries.

By the time we'd stripped them of anything of value, we had 7 rifles, 5 shotguns, 12 handguns, 5 knives, 33 ounces of gold Eagles 1 roll each of junk halves and quarters and two rolls of junk dimes. Two of the rifles were FALs, 2 were PTR-91Fs, 2 were M1A Loadeds and one was an M1A Super Match. The shotguns were all Remington, 870s or 11-87s. The handguns included two H&K USP Tactical's, several 1911s and some Glocks. I claimed the Super Match, the 2 Loadeds and the pair of USPs. Some of those suppressors from Montana were for USP Tactical's. I was the only one of us that had the 20 round M1A magazines and I had 100 I got from 44mag dot com.

We fired up the tractors and let them warm up. While they were smoothing out, we re-filled the saddle tanks. We checked the pickup the guys had come in and found 12 gallons (2 cases) of PRI-G. The dual tanker had 8,000 gallon tanks and we added 4 gallons to each tank so it could do its magic on the trip home. We decided to drive straight through, stopping only for bathroom/coffee breaks. Less than 24 hours later, we pulled in and parked the tractors and trailers.

The next day, I emptied one of my chain saws and filled it with gas from the tanker and 2 cycle engine oil. It fired right up so the gas was good.

"I used the atlas and located Lincolnwood, IL. Forget it; it was on the north side of Chicago."

"Did you look up Garden Grove?"

"I didn't bother, that's LA and if the nukes didn't get it and the Caldera didn't get it, the 'Big One' got it."

"I wonder if we could find what we need in St. Louis or Kansas City."

"You'd risk going there?"

"The radiation has to be all but gone. I'd risk a trip to both. Probably get a truckload of trade goods and maybe some gold and silver from a dealer."

"Could we go back to the western apparel store, I need a new straw hat."

"I don't know if we can find more of the same."

"Just as long as it's new and doesn't have a grease stain."

"Ok, we'll look."

The straw hats we chose were also top of the line but far less expensive at \$140 per. They had several different 200X straw hats so we'd find something. I wanted to take the semi because of what we might find. There was a second Costco in St. Louis and all

kinds of stores and warehouses we could check out. Sara said that Mary and June could tend to the garden and do the harvesting and canning. Joe and Charlie could come with us as an added measure of protection and split the recovered goods three ways, excluding the precious metals. Those would belong to whoever found them.

It took most of the day to unload the stuff from Hyrum. We loaded up the extra ordnance and left the next morning. While I hadn't said anything to Sara or the others, I half expected that sooner or later Joe or Charlie or both would suggest moving to our place in Steelville. Some of their neighbors really resented what they had and were accumulating. It just hadn't come to a head, yet. Well, it was ten years after the war so maybe nothing would come of it.

Of course we'd had the same trouble but our means of dealing with it had been effective. We always watched our backs when we left and rarely went alone. I had one thing high on my list, a Night Force 12-42x56mm Mil Dot scope and a set of A.R.M.S. mounts. Once I had that, Sara could have my Loaded.

We started at the western apparel store, got the hats, more jeans and shirts, more boots and a few miscellaneous choices, like belts and buckles. Then we went to the other Costco store. It was in what had been a higher radiation zone ten years before. We managed to get about half a load from there that was still usable. Then we hit one of the other Sam's Clubs and had the first 40 feet of the trailer full.

Mary and June had given Joe and Charlie lists of things to look for and they had driven up in Charlie's pickup. We locked up the trailer and dropped it where it sat when we split up. Sara began to direct me to the precious metals dealers. Most of the stores had been broken into and the counters looted. One store even had the large safe broken into. However, I had those thermal lances Jerry had written about and a bottle of gas and we opened the remainder ourselves. Some contained disappointedly small amounts. But, we hit every place we could find and every pawn shop in the area.

As long as someone could produce, we now had the means to buy it. We found several gun stores in the area and stocked up on ammo, especially the rimfire and the .45 Colt and .45-70. One guy had a large stock of Black Hills and that went into the trailer. I found the scope, mounts and a laser sighting device. Late in the day, we met up with Charlie and Joe and they said they were heading back. Sara told them we were going to stay another day and pick up a last few items. We hitched up the trailer and moved to an area with no residual radiation to spend the night.

We ate Mountain House meals and Sara started going through the Business to Business Yellow Pages. She finally found what she was looking for; it put her in a good mood...

One thing she found was a gun distributor and we filled the trailer. We needed a trailer to finishing loading all of the ammo. We might not have the firearm to use it, but ammo was a trade good. The other place was a can warehouse and we needed more trailers.

She said that if we could get enough 53' trailers we could load the rest of the cans and come back for them. I dropped the trailer and we went looking. It didn't take long to find an empty 53' trailer. We went back to the gun distributor and cleaned him out. Then, we headed to the can warehouse, again. I backed it up to the loading ramp and switched the tractor back to the first trailer. Meanwhile she had a propane fueled forklift running and was loading the second trailer. When she had that trailer filled, she said when we came back; we'd find more trailers and fill them too.

She suggested finding the ones that would let us hook up a 5<sup>th</sup> wheel dolly so we could pull both trailers home at the same time. I think what Sara was describing was a B train. A fifth wheel dolly was attached to the first trailer and towed the second trailer. In theory, you could have as many trailers as you had the power to pull. However, the roads were no longer that good and a double trailer was the most I thought I was willing to try.

On the way home, she counted the bags of coins and writing the contents of each bag on a pad of paper. It took the entire trip home and we'd done well. We had just short of \$7,000 face value in junk silver, over 1,000 ounces of .999 fine silver, and 433.5 ounces of gold coins all 22 carat in tenth, quarter, half and full ounce. Apparently, 24 carat coins weren't a good market item or they'd sold off what they had before the war.

When we got home, we dropped the load, had supper and crawled into bed. The next morning we waited until Mary and June showed up and told them we were returning to bring back two trailer loads of enameled steel cans. They said they were having better luck with the new lids we'd brought back from Hyrum, no failures to seal, yet.

We found two 53' trailer with dollies and loaded the first with the remaining cans. Altogether, there had been a shade more than a 40' trailer load. Sara asked me to drop it and take the other trailer to a couple of places she wanted to check out. One place stored tobacco products and the other liquor. We'd had people asking us to trade some of both and had done so, especially with the tobacco since neither of us smoked. We took all the tobacco and finished filling the trailer with liquors, starting with the better and working our way down. We could always come back and clean the place out.

While I hadn't wanted to pull a road train, I managed to do so without losing control. It wasn't the fastest trip home and then there was the matter of where to put the trailers when we got there. The food and liquor went on our property and the cans on an empty lot next door. Even if someone managed to break into those trailers, they'd be disappointed.

We looked around our 2½ acres when we got home and realized that we didn't have any space left if Joe and Charlie wanted to move. The lot next door was the same size, 2½ acres. A row of blackberries and two rows of blue spruce and another pipe gate and pipe fences would secure that lot the same as ours and we could store all the trailers and goods there that we wanted. A much larger storage building could be erected using the materials from our storage building and Joe and Charlie's.

It was either that or a chain link fence and I liked the idea of the blackberries. After canning season ended, Mary and June helped Sara get enough root cuttings to plant the blackberry hedge all around the second lot. Joe and Charlie fabricated another gate, this one 12' wide and fences 12' deep. We had the seedlings started in the greenhouse and would be able to plant two rows come spring. Joe and Charlie asked about the second lot and I explained that I'd always had it in the back of my mind that they might want to move out of Rolla.

"We've talked about it ever since the war. We had to wait until our kids became adults. Well, Julie is 18 and Mark 17. Charlie's daughter is also 17. They're fully equipped fire-arms wise and can use what they have effectively. The three of them could live in either place."

"I don't want Janice living by herself, so she'd have to live with Joe's two. We've located new double wide mobile homes, nice ones. We have almost everything it would take to assemble and level them. We have the generators and can get more wind turbines and all that. Have to get a well dug, put in septic, so forth and so on. I can get my hands on an extra-large motel sized septic tank. Not so sure about the well."

"The guy that dug mine is still in Rolla, let me get you his name. You two thinking about using the other lot?"

"Do you mind?"

"Not at all. Actually I was thinking about taking down our three storage buildings and building a large one over there. I also thought about storing all of the trailers over there and moving the barn there too. We could swap out the septic tank and my well produces enough for the three families. We'd probably still put in a well over there rather than run a water line. At least those were some of the things I was thinking about doing when the subject came up. It's not my way or the highway, you two have to decide what you think is best."

"We'll talk it over."

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"What you said makes sense. We'd all be in one location and it's the better protected location. Going to be a while before that blackberry hedge offers much protection; probably two or three years. Those spruce you planted don't grow very fast and you had problems with the poplars. Best bet would to put in a chain link fence right in front of the blackberries and the trees behind them. We know where to get the fencing supplies and razor wire. We don't much look forward to stringing razor wire but it's the best choice. Have to leave enough room between the fence and the hedge so we can pick both sides."

"Why didn't you put in a fence on this lot?"

“Well, it cost too much at the time and we couldn’t afford it. Would have solved some problems that Bravo and Delta eventually solved for us. How much fencing is available?”

“Miles.”

“Assuming we didn’t fence the lots separately, we’d only need 1,980 feet less the two gates.”

“I was thinking about that Tom. We could use chain link gates and the pipe gates. One would keep people out and the other vehicles out; unless someone had a dozer.”

“Yeah and another thing, we could take down one tree and a small section of blackberries and move between the two lots without having to go outside the fence. Those dogs would be free to roam both lots too.”

“Sounds good, but I’ll have to clear with Sara.”

“What, she got you pu....”

“Don’t ever talk like that, I don’t like it. I’m just sure if she heard you say it we’d be burying you. We get along very well thank you. It’s just common courtesy that I solicit her opinion. We’ve talked about it, a little.”

“Sorry, if I was out of line.”

“This time, Charlie you really were. Please don’t talk like that about my wife.”

“Sorry.”

Sara and I didn’t have that kind of relationship but I sure wasn’t going to discuss it. I never ask about their relationships with their wives because that was between them and their wives. Some things just aren’t talked about very often, if at all. I may have left a hint here and there putting this together, but I never really said anything, think about it.

The first step was digging holes for the poles. That took a while and we were using two posthole diggers mounted on old Ford tractors. Then, we set a pole in each hole, another day or so. We braced all the poles making certain they were vertical. Finally we got a load of Ready-mix, started to pour concrete. It took more than one load because the poles were 10’ a part meaning there were close to two hundred. Eventually, they were all set in place and the concrete hardened.

Even with the accelerator we added to the concrete we let them set for 30 days. We moved all the trailers to the second lot and towed out the double wide homes. We decided where to set them and ran the water, sewer, propane and electrical lines. They

each took time to erect a small block building to hold their new, spare generator and their rebuilt unit. We ran fuel lines from my diesel tanks adding two additional pumps and hooked them in.

It was flat out cold when we started hanging the chain link fence. We worked as fast as we could just to stay warm. The way we did it was to attach one end of a roll to a terminal pole and unroll it, leaning it against the poles. Then, when the roll was unrolled, we used some 2x4s and bolts to fashion something to pull against and used a tractor and chain to pull the fence tight. I'm sure that professional chain link installer were probably turning over in their graves with our home setup but it worked and we kept the fence tight as we worked our way to the end, attaching the fence to the posts.

We had 20 rod rolls. A rod is 5.5 yards or 16.5 feet. Therefore, each roll was 330 feet long. We went down the one side, across the back, up the other side and then started on the hard part, the front with the openings and gates. We had put in the proper poles to support the chain link gates and putting in the gates was the easy part. We strung ½ roll up to the gate and cut it. Then we strung a full roll between the two gates. Finally, we hung the rest of the half roll to complete the fence. Before each section of fence went up, we installed something called a coil wire. If you ask me, a better name might have been a bottom tension wire. We used hog rings to attach the fence to the tension wire.

That was the easy part. We attached the fence to the poles with aluminum fasteners. The really hard part was attaching the razor wire on top. The stuff was sharp! But, let me tell you, when we were done no one was going over the fence. We used the heaviest gauge fabric we could get in a 2" mesh and going through it would be a challenge, but possible. Until Bravo and Delta heard you. They were trained to lay and wait until you were coming through the wire before they attacked. The training had been worth the food it cost. Of course if you were a Navy SEAL and had a Hush Puppy mounted, you might get in...remember, our USP Tactical's had a version of the Hush Puppies.

By the time we had the fence complete, it was time to plant the spruce seedlings. They were beginning to harvest the first crops from the garden by the time we were ready to assemble and level the houses. Of course the first thing we had to do was find someone who knew how to pull the two sections together. We had the equipment to do it. We got it done, connected the water, sewer, gas and lights. Then, we got two more of the Outdoor Wood Boilers and Charlie plumbed them in for both heat and hot water.

We got that fancy heat tape they use that's self-regulating and installed it on the water and sewer pipes and then wrapped them in insulation tubing. Finally, we added the skirting and the homes were done. Not! Both Charlie and Joe wanted decks off their front door and a good set of steps off their back doors. That was probably the easiest part, one day per. We got it all done before the fourth of July. Remember that? Independence Day! Anyway, we took the day off and had a cookout.

Now that we had the room, before we did anything else, we built a hen house on the other lot and Joe brought out most of his brood hens and his rooster. We emptied their store rooms, along with ours, and erected that large store room on the other lot. It was enough bigger, we had to go find more metal siding. Both of them had used concrete on their poles and we ended up getting all new poles. The old poles were treated with creosote and we couldn't burn them. We did cut ours off just above the concrete and dig out the concrete, freeing up that space for future use. They left their pole buildings as was, but empty and absent siding.

With the supplies secured in the new building, we started on a much larger pole barn. After the poles were in and set, we stripped the panels off our barn and used the extra we'd brought back to finish off the new one. A new, larger, corral was erected and the horses and mules led to their new home through the cut in the hedge and trees between the two lots.

The hay was moved along with the grain, the corral dismantled to burn in the outdoor furnaces, the poles cut off at ground level and the concrete dug out. We got more than our share of looks when we took the poles and concrete wrapped stubs to the landfill. I do believe that some of our fellow Steelville residents were peeved with our three families occupying five acres, growing horses and having what we'd spent long hard hours and no small amount of risk acquiring. That didn't keep some from bartering for tobacco, liquor and food. We'd open the chain link gate and set up a table with our wares, letting them come to us.

Some of the after effects of the war were showing up with an increase of cases of cancer. The effects of the caldera eruption were also seen in the form of breathing problems. All forms of motor vehicles and engine powered equipment were giving up the ghost and gasoline was almost equal to silver in value. We sold our mules for multiples of what we'd originally paid for them, so area farmers could get a few more years of crops.

We had our section of the Mark Twain National Forest pretty well cleaned up of deadfall and dead standing trees. This led us to begin harvest the misshapen and diseased trees during the winter and allowing them to dry for a year before we cut them up and turned them into firewood. The firewood was then set aside for a second year to fully cure. It was hard work...nobody ever said it wouldn't be...but we persevered.

The wild game had recovered; but, with so many needing the food, we bought directly from the farmers who had beef and pork and processed it ourselves when the weather turned cold. That was the rule all these years later, extremely cold winters and above normal precipitation.

Cumbre Vieja on Las Palmas erupted and that hanging section fell off into the Atlantic, bringing more trials and tribulations for those on the coasts. Joe picked up word on his Yaesu of another huge tsunami in the western Pacific. More and more of the volcanoes



in the Cascade Range came to life adding even more ash to the air. I believe I mentioned earlier that Nature was getting her revenge against mankind.

Of those natural disasters, the ones that affected us the most were the volcanic eruptions. The ash was abrasive as always and the reduced sunlight reduced the amount of food we grew. While we always had enough for ourselves and the three family members in Rolla, some seasons we didn't have much excess. Our garden was pretty much as large as it was going to get unless we planted that unused half acre on the second lot.

When we'd moved in the doublewides, we'd had to open a hole to get them in because the gates were only 10' and 12' wide. The kids announced they wanted to move to Steelville. With the chain link fence and what not, we told them they'd have to find travel trailers and set them on the second lot. The water well we'd put in for the livestock was a good well and they'd have water. We had the old septic tank and it could be reinstalled. We could get more of the Outdoor Wood Boilers. Arrangements would need to be made for wood stoves, the propane was gone. They could pump the diesel into the empty tankers and store it here. They'd have to bring the QD 12.5s and the spare everything.

We had enough electrical output with our turbines to provide them with some. Power wasn't a problem. They used most of that half acre to set their trailers and put in a small garden plot. The three of us installed the various services and since the garden wasn't over the leech field put it in at a more reasonable depth.

I was picking up the first hint of gray at my temples and Charlie and Joe had lost most of their hair. I didn't tell Sara but she had a few gray hairs herself. I'm not sure if we wore hats and long sleeves as protection against the UV or as a fashion statement. Maybe it was because the average temperature was about 15° cooler. Ham's in the northern states had been reporting heavy, long lasting, snowfalls for years. Each year they'd melt off. Sometimes it wasn't until late July or early August and it was usually a different time each year. There was no one suggesting another ice age, but more than one radio operator said the only way to grow anything was in a heated greenhouse with grow lamps. We were reduced to using those varieties with the shortest growing season.

"Sometimes..."

"Sometimes what Sara?"

"Those kids. Especially Mark. He makes me want to pull my hair out. I tried talking to Mary about it, but she just said she'd mention it to Joe."

"What exactly is it that he does that upsets you?"

"Just those on the top of my list?"

"You have a list?"

“Well, not written down, but in my mind I do. If I had a nickel for every time I caught him leering at me, I’d buy IBM. You know how he’s always hated picking the blackberries. He won’t even lend a hand when June, Mary or I ask him to help us move a full box of canned goods. Julie and Janice are better about helping, a lot. Still I sense some resentment. I’m at my wit’s end.”

“I’ll talk to both Joe and Charlie and we’ll get this straightened out. You realize that with the three families here, our livestock and our stored goods you almost have to go out the gate to change your mind. I never realized how crowded 5 acres could become.”

“You sound like you have something in mind.”

“I suppose I do, but you may not like it.”

“I’m open to any idea that would solve the problem, Tom.”

“I found a quarter-section out when I was looking for hay and grain. It’s not much, 160 acres and since we sold the mules, we don’t have the means to farm it. But I checked the place out. It’s an old 2 story house with a finished attic and basement. That basement is hand laid limestone. It had a coal/wood burning furnace. There was even a couple of tons of coal and maybe 20 cords of firewood, back then. The barn is fairly big, stalls for milk cows, pens for horses. There is a chicken house with a fenced in yard. Propane fueled stove and hot water heater. Didn’t see a propane tank so I assume it’s buried. There was evidence that it had been remodeled, drywall instead of lathe and plaster. Big machine shed, but no equipment. It was just a thought.”

“We have quite a herd of horses. If we worked together, we could probably plant enough corn and oats to feed the horses. You didn’t say, but I’ll bet he had a permanent hay field and a pasture.”

“I did see a pasture. Don’t know about a hay field.”

“Could we get the seed to plant corn, oats, barley and hay?”

“We could probably work a deal with one of the farmers where we buy our hay and grain.”

“Let’s go look at this farm.”

“Now?”

“Sure; why not?”

“Get your coat, it’s cool out.”

“Before we leave, set the trip odometer.”

“Ok, it’s zeroed. What did you bring for firearms?”

“The Loaded and the 590A1. I see you have the Super Match and your 590A1.”

“You never know; we’ve been extremely lucky not having people at our place.”

“Wow, that was quick. How far?”

“Three point six miles. Let’s check the house out first.”

We checked the house, including the basement, first and second floors and the attic. The coal was still there and the firewood undisturbed. There was old hay and straw in the loft. The corn crib was full of unshelled corn. They must have had a big flock of chickens at one time.

Power would be required for the well. Two of our turbines would provide all we needed. I still had new batteries stored with the acid stored separately. We also had our spare charge controllers and inverters. When we found them, we took all we could haul. It looked like it had real possibilities, to me.

“I like it. It’s a good thing you took my advice and kept the stored goods in that storage building separated. That will make it easy to move our things. Moving the horses should be easy; either herd them over or put on the halters and run a lead. I do so hate losing my blackberries. But, I can take root cuttings and start over. I’ll just transplant my strawberry plants. Guess we’ll be out the greenhouse, huh?”

“Well...you’re assuming we move. What about Joe and Charlie’s kids moving?”

“How do you intend to pull that off?”

“Simple, I’ll explain the facts of life to those two. Charlie will understand for sure. He once made a remark and I cut him off at the knees. Joe was right there and heard it. I think once I explain it, they’ll make the decision for us.”

“What was said?”

“The remark wasn’t even completed and I’ll not repeat it. It had to do with me saying I’d check with you.”

“And, Charlie accused you of being...oh my. An obscene remark suggesting I had you wrapped around my finger or other parts of my anatomy?”

“You know the remark?”

“Well, I’ve heard it mentioned about other people.”

“I’m not, you know.”

“I know that!”

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“So, fellas, that the long and short of it. Mark makes Sara very uncomfortable and the girls don’t seem to have their hearts in it.”

“Mark won’t be leering anymore; you can count on that Tom. I have a word with Julie too, count on it.”

“Hey, me too, Tom. I’ll speak to Janice and lay down the law.”

“I have another alternative I’d like to bring up.”

“Shoot.”

“Sara and I talked about moving. I mentioned a small farm, a quarter-section, I’d run across when I was out looking for hay and grain. Old farmhouse, remodeled, with wood slash coal heat. Big barn with hay and straw in the loft, missed that. Large empty machine shed, but no machinery. Corn crib full of unshelled corn. Don’t know about the well since there was no power. Sara and I discussed moving there. I brought up the possibility of your three moving there.”

“I’d have to see the place.”

“I would too.”

“You’d consider it?”

“Depends on what we saw, for my part. I’m not too happy with the way my two are behaving, believe you me.”

“I’m with Joe. Did you notice how Julie and Janice are in one travel trailer and Mark in the other? I haven’t gotten to the bottom of that either.”

“I asked Mark about that Charlie and he said it was Julie’s idea. I asked her and she said she felt more comfortable with Janice.”

“I’m not going to get involved in what goes on in your families. I’ve told you about the problem and have offered one possible solution. I don’t like my wife being uncomfortable at our own place.”

“You noticed that Mark is unhooking his trailer, right?”

“I noticed.”

“I confronted those two last night at our house. It seems that Mark has been making advances to his sister and cousin. I told him to be gone in 24 hours. I addressed Julie about her attitude and was, to say the least, disappointed in her response. I hear enough of ‘it’s not fair’ from others to have to put up with it from our daughter. I know that Charlie did the same with Janice because he came over after talking to her with fire in his eyes. All three of them are going back to Rolla. The girls to Charlie’s place and Mark any darn where he wants as long as it isn’t our place.”

“I’m sorry, I never expected anything like that.”

“We didn’t either, that’s the shame of it.”

“No hard feelings?”

“Not against you or Sara, not one bit. Can’t honestly say there aren’t any hard feelings but they’re directed in a different direction. Nothing happened, thank God.”

In our country, depending on location, cousins sometimes married cousins. It was the subject of various laws and more than a few jokes. Most incest was father-daughter according to some. Others thought the most common form was sibling incest. It’s not a subject that is discussed much because it violates laws, morality and religious views. Fortunately, Mark’s frustrations at his sister and cousin were refocused on an adult who didn’t accept it, bringing it to the fore. The subject was dropped like a hot potato, probably due to embarrassment.

We tried a couple of those bales of hay and the horses wouldn’t eat it. We settled back into a routine and Charlie, Joe and I took over the chores previously assigned to the teens. If we could find a corn sheller, we could shell the corn and use it as horse feed. We had enough horses now that we hadn’t really given up much by selling the mules. The horses were trained to saddle, harness and packs.

We now had more than the sawbucks. We had pack saddles and panniers which allowed us to carry different kinds of loads. We could use our backpacks as panniers and add a bit more at the top between the two backpacks on the pack saddle. Generally in the late fall before the first snow of the season, Sara and I would saddle up two geldings and load up four more and take a two week riding trip. As we became more experienced over the years, we were able to take longer trips, distance wise, not time wise.

However we came as close to having trouble of the sort we had coming back from Hyrum on those trips. Horses were valuable, our firearms were valuable and our goods were valuable. For some, even Sara was valuable. We learned to avoid those places. And of course there was the trip she and I made to Kansas City, Missouri and Kansas.

Our first stop was the Lake City Plant and we took what we wanted, leaving hundreds of times what we took there in the warehouses. We looked for precious metal dealers, checked out the Costco stores and the Sam's Clubs. We even hit a couple of grocery distribution warehouses. Gun stores were there, but disappointing, most of the military type of weapons having been removed. Not so some of the ammo, bullets, powder and primers we could use.

Looked at that progressive loader long and hard and left it set. Let someone who could use it have it, we had enough ammo for the rest of our lives. As we used up the .45 Colt and .45-70, it was reloaded with 40gr of Pyrodex or 70gr, as applicable. We did find two precious metal dealers with high levels of stock and added to our holdings. As long as it had been since, it was a shock to find any that hadn't been salvaged. One of them dealt in junk silver and Krugerrands exclusively and the other silver and gold Eagles. The one that dealt in the Canadian and Australian coins had been cleaned out. We only knew what he carried from a price list.

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We heard later that Mark had been murdered. They had no suspects and a 12 gauge loaded with 15-pellet 00 buck only leaves you with a few clues. 3" chamber, Magnum Express load, no empty shell; either a single shot, pump or semi-auto and the shooter picked up the case. The shot hadn't been up close, it left a bit of a pattern. Speculation was an 870 with an improved choke. Can they tell that by the pattern?

Guess I'd better wrap this up. There's a comet in the night sky and we've been seeing it for weeks now. Don't know for sure, but it looks like it will pass in front of the planet. Heard some discussion on the amateur net, some say it will hit us, others say it will, pass before us and the third group says behind us. Some guy who claims to be an astronomer claims he still has a working computer and the computer says it will hit us...on the other side of the planet. But, he also said the margin of error is 25% east or west of the point of impact. The nutcase compared it to a fiction story, Lucifer's Hammer. I got the book from the library and have been reading it. It's not very reassuring.

I'm back. It hit within 100 kilometers of the speculated target, near the former site of Beijing. One would have thought that that would be the end of it. But no...a whole bunch of the Earth splashed up into near space and has been falling back down, cutting a swath from Canada to Central America. It brought to mind that our Moon was created when a large asteroid hit the Earth and so much material was blasted out into space that it combined to form the Moon.

Sara and I are taking another trip, longer this time, a whole month. I'll pick this up when we get back.

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